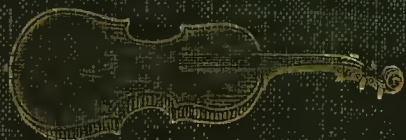


THE
STOLEN
FIDDLE



WALTER H.
MAYSON.

A LIST OF POPULAR WORKS
OF FICTION
ISSUED BY
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WILL BE FOUND AT THE END OF
THIS VOLUME

THE
STOLEN
FIDDLE



The

STOLEN FIDDLE

Author of
‘Colazzi’
‘The Heir of Dalton’
etc., etc.

By
WALTER H.
MAYSON

Ah, lovely fiddle ! how I've treasured thee
As springing from the hand of one so deit,
So worthy veneration ! Can it be
That beauty such as thine—each line so true,
So faultless every curve—is of to-day,
And that I look upon a Forgery ?
Oh, it is hard to think that any one
Could, for the love of gain, subvert the truth,
Steal from the Artist his deserved right,
And palm upon Credulity, a Lie !

LONDON
FREDERICK WARNE & CO.
AND NEW YORK
1897

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TO

MY PARENTS

IN LOVING REMEMBRANCE OF THEIR SYMPATHY WITH ME

IN EARLY LITERARY EFFORTS, THE FOLLOWING STORY

OF A CORNER OF ENGLAND SO DEAR TO THEM

IS DEDICATED

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THE STOLEN FIDDLE

CHAPTER I

Jack Sinclair and his Fiddle

ON the eastern shores of Lake Windermere, opposite, or nearly so, to Lake Side Railway Station, there stands 'Ghyll Foot,' a handsome mansion, square, white, and substantial, commanding the whole of the lower reach of the water. The grounds are in excellent taste and, though the season is that of winter, in superb order, the owner, Lord Walton, sparing no expense in their keep. And the interior of the edifice testifies still more to the refinement of taste displayed, there being nothing, either in the furniture or its distribution, approaching vulgarity.

And yet Lord Walton was 'new blood,' he being only second earl of that name, the first,

his father, having risen from the ranks by sheer greatness of mind. But there was unmistakably a something in this last baron that told you at once he had had a father, and had seen no small share of life, though comparatively young. But I will introduce him.

In a fine, handsome room, well lighted and well warmed by a roaring fire, for it is about six o'clock and a cold, wild night, sits Lord Walton and his sister, Lady Isabel, they two living together (since both parents died) in the firmest friendship and mutual love. He was reading; and, as the shaded lamp fell on his profile, you could see a strongly-marked face, though by no means handsome—bold, yet soft as a woman's when softness held her sway over him. But he was like a lion when heated in argument or roused by any bitter or condoned wrong. Lazy to a degree when 'messaging about' at home, as he called it, he could be energy itself when called upon—and so much for him.

The Lady Isabel, his sister, was very like him, but much more handsome, and in every way a woman—full of soft beauty, and with a large, tender eye, though, by the way, she could make that eye flash fire, as could her brother, if occasion needed. Tall, though not too tall for a woman, she was well developed and clean in limb, and had a slight touch of majesty about her, though this served rather to draw one to her than to repel.

He was reading, and she was engaged in fancy needlework. Presently Lord Walton exclaimed, ‘What an ass you are!’

‘Thank you,’ said his sister; ‘you are amazingly complimentary.’

‘What on earth do you mean?’ said he; ‘I was speaking to that fool of a Mr. O’B. in that inimitable *North-West Passage*—you’ve read it, Bell?’

‘Yes;—and he certainly is a donkey. But talking of animals, just look at these two dogs on the rug. Lion has been asleep for long, and Rat won’t let him alone—first he

nibbles at one of his big ears, and then at the other, and then at his great paws. I just saw the big old fellow open one eye, and it is my opinion he will make him pay for his audacity in a few seconds.'

'Yes; there will be a squeal in a moment.' And, as he spoke, the great St. Bernard caught Master Rat, the weeëst terrier you could imagine, by the neck and gave him a small nip, which sent the little torment to the other end of the room. Quietly resuming his easy attitude, Lion once more was soon fast asleep, dreaming of big bones, one would imagine, by his most satisfactory sighs and grunts. There was now perfect quiet in the room, save the tick-tock of the timepiece over the huge fire; and the occasional wild roar of the wind about the house outside, only served to enhance the great comfort within. Presently, however, the ever-restless terrier gave a sniff under the door and a low 'yap,' waking up the other dog, which came lazily up to the door also and sniffed,

and wagged its great tail in evident satisfaction.

‘Who can be coming at this time of night?’ asked Lady Isabel; ‘for I am certain those dogs scent out some one. Ah!’ This ‘ah!’ was said in a lower tone, and there was just the shade of a blush on her fine face as a hasty footfall was heard in the hall. Then a ‘yap, yap’ from both dogs; then a hasty opening of the door; then a giant of a man entered, unannounced, with ‘Confound it all—what a night!’

‘Jack, by all that’s delightful!’ exclaimed Lord Walton, slapping his friend on the back—‘what on earth brings you, old man, to stir us up?’

Without taking the least notice of Lord Walton or his question, Jack Sinclair stood, with a merry twinkle in his eye, looking at Lady Isabel, and said, ‘Well, I’ll lay a wager you’ve been at that fancy stuff for three weeks, for I left you at it when I was here last, three weeks to-day!’ To

have heard Lady Isabel laugh would have done any one good ; but Jack never as much as took further notice of her, but, turning to Lord Walton, ‘ Well, old man, and how are you ? Down dogs !—they’ll worry me ! ’ They were, in fact, showing their joy at sight of one loved by all, in a remarkable manner, Lion with both paws on Jack’s shoulders, and slobbering away at him in wild delight, and Master Rat, fairly *in* one of his coat pockets, was gnawing away at his coat sleeve, as though he had got hold of one of his cousins, rats absolutely.’

After these greetings, Jack sat beside Isabel, and, with the most comical expression, said, ‘ “ Would I were a glove upon that hand ! ” —but *was* it “ glove ” that Romeo said ? That’s right ; laugh at a fellow, do,—but please put it away and give me some dinner.’

‘ We dine at seven, Jack,’ said Walton, ‘ and it is now turned six—can you wait, or have a biscuit ? ’

‘ Oh, I’ll wait,’ said Sinclair, ‘ But talking

of stockings—or was it gloves?—reminds me of boots, and I have a good one for you.’

‘Was there ever such a man?’ interrupted Isabel: ‘he has barely sat down, when he is on to his yarns, hungry as he is!’

‘Well,’ Jack began, ‘you must know that at a certain club at Manchester they play a deal at billiards, and on one particular occasion (they don’t play for buttons, mind) one of the members came out of the billiard-room looking as savage as a bear, no end of a loser, no doubt. On the top stair leading to the hall was another member, lacing his boot; so the savage one gave him a push in his annoyance, saying, “Get out of the way! hang it, *you’re always lacing your boots!*” —fact, I do assure you.’

‘Well, of all the fellows, you *are* the rummest,’ said Lord Walton, laughing till he wiped his eyes. ‘But did a duel come of it?’

‘Duel! no, man; the one he pushed called after him, “Another fifty, old man, I’ll

swear!" But you ask what brings me. A fiddle, my boy—the one I had ordered from Blane—and it *is* a fiddle! Just ring and ask them to bring up my traps, and I'll show it you.'

Whilst they were waiting, Lady Isabel said, 'Do you know, Jack, I cannot thoroughly master that adagio of Bach—that No. 1, you remember—that which Joachim plays so finely. Can you help me?'

'Well, I'll do my best, young lady, but I'm only a poor hand at slow movements—which reminds me of another good one——'

'Oh, but here comes the fiddle,' said Lord Walton; 'so you can save your yarn.'

Jack took the case from the footman, and brought out the instrument. It was on the lines of Stradivarius, and was altogether a remarkable fiddle.

'There, old girl, put that beside your six-hundred-pound Strad., and say if an Englishman cannot hold his candle yet to the old man.' Jack said this with quite a swagger—for him,

and looked first at one, then at the other, evidently enjoying their great surprise.

‘Why, it’s wonderfully like mine—such finish, and such character—and the varnish is simply alive,’ Lady Isabel said. ‘And look at the *f*—it is carved so truly, and the head is so delicate and yet so bold. Oh! it is a lovely fiddle,’ and she twanged the strings, which gave forth a clear, sonorous sound that no true musician can hear unmoved.

Lord Walton said: ‘Jack, there is a future for a man who can do work like this. It is superb!’

‘Yes, Bob,’ said Jack; ‘but you have a generous soul, and therefore give to real merit its due. What will you say when I tell you that even to this day there are those who run this work down all ends up, and hound the fellow as we would vermin over the fells! But it won’t all do; he’ll beat them yet, mark my words. And I’ll help him all *I* can, and scores of others are as determined.’

‘Do you notice,’ said Isabel, ‘how the under

part of the scroll is finished—as smooth and true as the outside ; such pains must have been taken !’

‘Why,’ said Jack, ‘that is what we call the throat ; and why should not a true work of art resemble nature ? Look at *your* throat.’

‘Now, do be quiet ; you always come round to some such nonsense.’

‘It is no nonsense to have a throat like yours, Bell. And, as I was saying, hold the mirror up to nature and your true artist is—Blane. But there’s the dressing-bell. We will discuss this piece of wood later on.’

And I think it is high time to close this chapter, which I shall do, and open the next with a short introduction of Jack Sinclair.

CHAPTER II

An Original

SINCLAIR was the nephew of Sir John Sinclair of Ambleside, Baronet, and heir-apparent to the title. He was a second Porthos (you have read Dumas, of course?). He was six feet three inches, very broad in the chest, and, in one word, a splendid man, though not handsome in feature. A thorough gentleman, humorous to a degree, tender-hearted as a baby, generous to a fault, he was, as I have before said, beloved by everybody—but one person, and of him more later on. It goes without saying, as the reader may have already gathered, that he was a decided ‘character,’ ever alive to a good anecdote, and mad after fiddles. If he loved one person more than another it was his uncle, who had had

a terrible shock in the desertion of his wife, who eloped with a talented violinist, an Italian, carrying with her their only child, a daughter of three years. Though this had taken place some fifteen years ago the wound was still fresh, and, as a natural consequence, the baronet seldom went into society. It is no wonder, therefore, that Jack gave him most of his company, and did much to soften his sorrow by his unfailing spirits.

In due course the trio are seated at dinner, and the meal is not made any the duller by Jack forming one of that trio. He was, as he put it, in broad Scotch, 'fair grippit wi' hunger': but, for all that, he gave a sly joke now and then, and, as a natural consequence, a 'yarn' occasionally, one of which I give without any excuse.

'You must know,' said Jack, 'that I came yesterday from Manchester, and I heard one or two good ones there. An idle vagabond of a fellow was completely wound up—not a rap to bless himself with, so there was nothing for

it but he must go to that most obliging relative with his watch. Well, in due course he got into his "glory," as he put it, and was going home one night about eleven, down Market Street, Manchester, where there are, as you know, several fishing-tackle shops, with a rod, line, and fish hanging out over the footpath. My lord stops under one of them, steadies himself, and knocks softly at the door. Presently a policeman comes up, and asks him what on earth he is doing—tells him to "move on," but the fellow only says in a whisper, "Hush, Robert—*don't you see he's got a bite?*"' Lord Walton nearly choked with laughing, and one of the footmen had actually to make a bolt out of the room. As to Isabel, she fairly cried again, and told Jack that it was too bad.

'That's just what Robert said, when he gave the fellow a kick and sent him on a further voyage of discovery—which, by the way, turned up a trump ere long; for it so happened that he had to pass his uncle's on

his way home, and, this being in Chapel Street, Salford, he stopped also at *his* door and knocked. Presently his relation opened a window over his head, and asked him what he wanted. "What time is it?" he replied. "Hang you, how should *I* know?" "Why, you ought to know—you've got *my* watch!"

'Now, Jack,' said Lord Walton, nearly purple in the face, 'if you do not shut up, there will be no more devoured at this table by me to-day. You would be worth no end of money to a grasping hotel-keeper, if it were only to sit at *table d'hôte* and dole out your yarns; depend upon it, there would not be much eaten.'

'The same idea has occurred to many, old man, and I mean to try it when all else goes to the bad. But Bell is off again.'

And, in truth, Isabel was laughing in a way that made the men laugh also for very sympathy. Jack said, 'What is the game now?'. Walton asked her to share it with them, but she said it **would** keep, and they

had had quite enough to serve for one meal. Later on, they rose together and went to one of the drawing-rooms, where very soon one of Mozart's fine trios for piano, violin, and violoncello was beautifully rendered. This was followed by one from the pen of Beethoven, and then Isabel asked Jack to set her right with the No. 1 of Bach, violin solo, about which we have before spoken. She tried it on her Stradivari, and the rich, mellow tones were most ably brought out; but she was at fault with most of the chords, with which it abounds—that is, in the adagio.

‘Now, Bell,’ said Sinclair, ‘you play it finely; but the chords should be thus,’ and he took the fiddle by Blane and wrenched out the four notes of the chords with a wrist of iron. ‘You see, you should just linger on the lower note of each chord, and sweep out the rest, holding the upper one, of course, to mark the time—thus,’ and he instanced his lesson most ably. ‘Bach wants a lot of study, and no end of strength of wrist and

finger; but the rising folks don't tumble to him, and they are the losers, preferring their senseless trash. Well, how does Blane go?'

Both said it was a superb fiddle, and so it was. Just at this moment a footman entered with coffee, and at the very moment Jack was saying he would not take a hundred pounds for the instrument. 'I shall leave it with you, Bell, for a week or two, and you will do me no end of a favour by playing on it: I will run down after Christmas, and we will have some quartettes. May I bring that ass of a Bolton, Bob, as he plays a good viola, and we shall have a rare time? He is a snob, I know, but let that pass.'

'By all means; give my respects, and bring him,' said Walton.

Isabel said nothing, but she gave a slight frown; for I may as well at once say that Bolton, a wealthy retired merchant, living in grand style at Wray Castle, was most marked in his attentions to her, and she

did not care for the man. Soon the music was ended, and it was many a long day before Jack saw his fiddle again, as he left early next morning for home, and the instrument was confided to Isabel, who saw it safe in its case in the room ere she retired to rest.

The case was not locked.

CHAPTER III

The Changed Fiddle

IT was on the second morning after the departure of Sinclair that Lady Isabel Walton repaired to the music drawing-room for an hour's practice on the Blane violin. She said to herself she felt in 'good form,' and meant to get over some difficult ground; and it was with a tender light in her beautiful eyes that she took up the case in which she had placed Jack's instrument on the previous evening, and, opening it, was on the point of taking it out, when she stood as though transfixed; for it was not the Blane fiddle at all that she stared at, but a German trade thing, worth about fifteen shillings. Then, when she realised the truth, she gave a passionate stamp with her foot and violently rang the bell,

in answer to which a footman hastily made his appearance. 'Tell Lord Walton I wish to see him here immediately.'

'Yes, my lady,' tremblingly answered the man, for he well knew from her imperious manner that there was a storm about. As he closed the door he growled, 'Now for it; she can make a fellow's knees knock together when she likes; but she's a good 'un for all that. What's up, I wonder?'

When Lord Walton entered where his sister was she did not speak, but simply pointed to the fiddle, lying staring with its ugly face as cool as though it was a Cremona of the first value. 'Well, my lass, I see it—what's the matter?'

'Upon my word, Bob, but you must be blind! Don't you see that Jack's lovely instrument has been exchanged by some one for this vile trash?' and she took it out of the case, and was on the point of knocking its head against the wall, but Lord Walton stopped her with, 'Don't do that, Bell; we

shall want that later on.' He said that very slowly, but there was a dark look on his face that would have frightened Master thief had he seen it. 'How on earth has this come about?' he went on. 'I would rather anything of my own had thus disappeared! But woe to that man or woman who has done this in my house, if I trace it! Come with me, Bell'; and afterwards, 'Lock up that rubbish as though it were gold, in the safe,' saying which he conducted his sister to the library, where he marshalled every man Jack about the place, women and helpers, and all. I told you at the outset, when he was roused he *could* be roused; and on this occasion he was most deeply mortified, and consequently very angry.

'Now, look here, you people; a most disgraceful thing has happened since Mr. John Sinclair left my house the other morning. He brought a valuable modern violin—fiddle, you know—for my sister to try, and for her to play on for a time. On opening

the case this morning she finds *this* instead of the instrument left by Mr. John Sinclair, which was made by a very talented man of the name of Blane. You will perhaps say "one fiddle is as good as another," my friends, but nothing of the sort ; and if it were, this is not the one belonging to my friend, and I ask you all—and I beg you to consider the position in which I am placed—do any of you know anything about this robbery ?'

All the 'people,' as he called the servants, stared in utter bewilderment, and there was a spontaneous chorus of 'Nothing, my lord.' 'But it must have gone by some one's hands,' said Walton ; 'and, mark me well, had the thief come from the outside, these dogs here would soon have let us know. So have a care ; if any one has done it, let him or her speak, and all I shall do is to instantly dismiss him or her, and nothing else at the moment ; but if I have to hunt the thing up, and find later on any one now here is the thief, it had been better if that thief had met

one of my bulls rather than me. You can all go, but once more, be warned. I know, Thompson (to the butler), what you would say—it is hard for all to be under a ban, so to speak, for the fault of one—if there *be* one in fault; but I am compelled to speak thus, as I must, and shall, trace the matter out, not for the value of the fiddle, mark me, but that such a thing should have happened in a house that, up to now, has been so blameless.'

'Before you go,' said Isabel, 'I ask, as a personal favour, if you will do your best to trace this, and keep your eyes and ears open. Be assured, I and my brother have no cause to suspect any one; but the thing must be brought to light, and no stone shall be left unturned to accomplish it.'

'Captain Simpson, a moment,' said Lord Walton, as the others all left the room. 'Be so good as to get steam up on the *Minnow*, and go yourself with a note to Mr. Sinclair. Wait until he reads it, and, if need be, wait a day, or even more, until he can

return with you. It is evident,' continued his lordship, as Simpson left the room, 'that we have a thief among us, Bell.'

'I fear so,' she assented, 'and it is most annoying; what *will* Jack say?'

'Oh, as to that, Jack's all right; he will be mad, as we are, but will hunt with me until we have unearthed our man. It appears somewhat trivial, I must admit, to have to make such a fuss over this, but it shall *not* be said that I have a dishonest servant under my roof, no, not if I have to pair a whole session in the House. Bless the business! And, besides, it was such a grand fiddle! By the way, which of the footmen brought in coffee that night Jack was here?'

'Reynolds,' replied Isabel; 'why do you ask?'

'Because, as he was entering the room, Jack was saying he would not take £100 for the fiddle. Reynolds, I am sure, is an honest man; his services for years have been all one could wish; but I feel anxious, because some-

thing of much more moment may next occur.' Lord Walton then rang the bell, in answer to which a footman appeared, who was desired to tell Mr. Thompson his lordship wished to speak with him. On the entrance of the butler, Lord Walton said, 'Have you anything in the shape of a clue by which one can be guided in this affair?'

'I have something to tell your lordship which may or may not lead to a clue, and I must beg you to forgive me not having mentioned it before now; but I kept it to myself in the hope of more surely laying hands on some one, although, for the life of me, I don't know who it may be. A week ago, you may remember, I was very unwell, and for one day I had to hand over my duties to my assistant, strictly charging him to be most careful that all the plate was put away in the safe at night after your lordship had dined, and to bring me the keys of the safe and my pantry. This was done. As you know, I sleep just over my pantry; and on this

particular night, feeling ill and somewhat anxious, I got up in the night (it was just two o'clock, for I heard the stable clock strike).'

'Pardon me, Thompson, did you hear any noise, any window open or shut, or voice outside? I ask this now, not to interrupt you after.'

'Nothing at all, my lord. The night was cold, but quite still, so I am certain. Well, I looked out of my window, which has for a side view the lake and the railway station, and you may judge of my amazement when I saw slowly travelling high overhead from the house to the lake what appeared to be a large, heavy parcel. It at first seemed suspended in mid-air; but I found there was a dim sort of line before and behind it, which I felt sure was a cord, and that mischief was about. Ill as I was I dressed like lightning, and put on my thick soft slippers to make no noise. I hurried out, skirted the north lawn, and reaching the shadow of one of the boat-

houses, stood trembling there, watching the slow descent of this mysterious affair. I could plainly see there was a very strong cord fast to a tree close to the lake near where I stood, and it appeared to me that this cord was fastened to the roof of the house, if I could judge by its upward inclination, and that the parcel was let down it by a noose or something, and its speed regulated. Slowly it came on, and then I heard the soft dip of an oar in the water close at hand. There was not time to think, so I rushed out and reached this parcel just as a man sprang from a boat and attempted to secure it. I was roused, I assure your lordship, and I dealt him a fearful blow which, I fear, nearly did for him, for he fell against a tree like a log, whilst I ran to the house with——’

‘Well, what was it?’ breathlessly asked his lordship.

‘Plate, worth £1000.’

Lord Walton and Isabel looked at each other, and the former very quietly said,

‘Thompson, you are a brave fellow, and I won’t forget this. But about the rascal in the boat?’

‘I roused the helpers in the stables, and we ran down after to see what or who he was, but all had vanished—man, boat, cord, and everything; and what puzzles me more than anything is, that I visited every man’s bedroom in the house, and there was not the slightest clue, nor had any man left his bed—so they all swore, and so it seemed.’

‘There is something deep here,’ mused Lord Walton. ‘How did you escape these dogs, Thompson? for you know how they give tongue if they hear the least noise in the night.’

‘Well, my lord, they did no end of sniffing about me as I crept along, but a “Down, Lion!” soon set all right, and young Rat was soon coiled up again on a mat.’

‘But who was the man who took your place when you were ill?’ asked Lady Isabel; ‘it all seems to turn on that to me.’

‘May I beg of you, my lady, and of you, my lord, to let me keep this to myself for a few days, for I greatly fear it would spoil all if the least suspicion were aroused in the guilty party. If an old servant may be allowed to suggest, let not a look or a word further escape about this business, and I will watch night and day, as I have done since I got hold of the plate. May I be allowed to do this?’

‘By all means, Thompson ; and, if you think it necessary, lock up all the plate in the safe in my bedroom.’

‘I do not consider it needful, my lord ; and I feel sure the precaution I have taken will make the rascal, whoever it is, think twice before he touches *my* plate again.—Does your lordship require anything further?’

‘Thank you—no ; and rest assured I shall not soon forget what you have done.’

Thompson then retired, and the brother and sister talked over the startling event for some time. From whichever point they

looked, it was very evident the would-be thief of the plate and the actual thief of the fiddle were one and the same, and that he was now under that roof—but who? for a better lot of servants was nowhere to be found in the Lake District—at least, Walton always said so; and it was mortifying to learn now that there was a black sheep among them—ay, and a very black one, too. But they would defer further going over the case until Jack came.

CHAPTER IV

Sinclair's Determination

JUST before dusk Sinclair made his appearance, and it was good to see his comical face when the 'double event,' as he called it, was laid before him. He gave a long whistle (in answer to which, by the way, both dogs came and took possession of him, as usual) and then he laughed (such a laugh, it fairly shook the windows); then he gave his leg a slap that would have broken any ordinary one, and finally exclaimed—

'I never heard of a couple of cleaner things! Why, man alive, if I could come such games, I'd buy you all up in no time! 'Pon my word, but there's a gem of a fellow about! And that rope affair!' and he went off again in a perfect roar, which had partly subsided, when

he burst out again with ‘and to think of old Thompson, thin as a pump-handle, knocking a burglar into the middle of next week! Oh, dear, dear, this will be the end of me!’ and he held his sides and fairly cried again. Lord Walton and Isabel laughed with him for very sympathy; but presently the former said—

‘It is just like you, old man, to take this so kindly; but surely you don’t intend to laugh it off and not hunt the fiddle up?’

‘Eh, mon, ye little ken Jock Sinclair an ye think he is sae daft! But let us first have a look at this exchange, and then I will tell you my plans.’

Lady Isabel soon brought the instrument, and it was a treat to see Sinclair handle it. Taking it in his left hand, he grasped it by the middle bout, holding it, belly up, resting his left elbow on his left knee, head rather on one side, and a most comical look in his face. He did not speak for a moment, and then he apostrophised the poor miserable thing thus—

‘Well, you certainly are a nice young man! But all things considered, it would have been just as well if somebody had wrung your neck whilst you were being born! Such a sweet and true outline! such delicacy in your curves! so noble in your purfling! and your under surface was so finely wrought before your most transparent varnish was put on! and really, your sound-holes are most true and so like poor old Strad., that it fairly affects one! Now I dare wager, you wretched cur, that you were conceived and created in half a day, varnished, strung, and sold and all! Of course, you have got for a label, “Antonius Stradivarius,” etc., etc., — yes, quite complete, nothing wanting!—You lying scoundrel! it is such as you that have turned many a good ear bad, and actually set those dead against all fiddles who might have made good fiddlers! But, I feel so wild, that I am game for any amount of trouble after seeing this, to recover poor old Blane! I shall at once write to all my friends over the country,

good, bad, and indifferent, and we will hunt up this thief or my name's not Sinclair!— Well, and what are *you* laughing at, Miss?’

Lady Isabel said, ‘Because you are so serious all in a moment. And you look so— so——’

‘So like a Scotsman in difficulties, say.’

‘No, I didn’t mean just that — but so like——’

‘Come, *do* out with it, Bell.’

‘Well, so like a Dandy Dinmont terrier, if I *must* speak,’ making for the door, ‘just about to worry a rat,’ and she fairly bolted, and left the others laughing.

Lord Walton then said he was quite sure that the baffled thief of plate was the thief of the fiddle, and, for his own satisfaction, he should at once write to Scotland Yard for an intelligent officer to be sent down by first train after receipt, have him on the premises in disguise, and then he should be quite at Sinclair’s service to go the length of England, if need be, to recover the stolen fiddle.

CHAPTER V

The Forged Stradivari

NOW, my respected friend, the reader, be you man, woman, or child, I must at once inform you that if you are not a fiddler, or fond of a fiddle, by all means skip this chapter, for we are going to the workshop of a maker of such things, and you will only be bored. But I warn you, at the same time, that, if you *do* skip, you will just miss the most important link in the chain of my story, and you will only have to 'try back' later on—so you had perhaps better wade through it at once.

The said workshop was situated in a well-known street in London ; and the said workshop was occupied by a singularly shrewd foreigner—whether German, Italian, or French I am not going to tell you—guess as much

as you like. There was a large front shop attached, now closed for the day, but the master of the place was evidently going to set about something very important, judging by his preparations. He was quite alone in his inner 'den,' as he named it (his assistants having left), and he was surrounded by such a multitude of what some would call litter, that a novice would simply have sat down in despair of ever producing anything in the shape of order out of such chaos. A fiddle here, minus a head; one there, fast in the cramps; a belly with a new bass bar hard by; another with some cracks just glued up, and in the stocks; a scroll partly carved; one carved, and a finger-board just added; a back in process of being curved; a set of ribs in their forming-blocks; an old head with a new neck spliced; an old fiddle scraped entirely white, ready for a modern coat of varnish; several fiddles hanging in all stages of decomposition, and tools, litter, dust, and objects only seen in such a place,

all around. Even hanging from the ceiling were fiddles; crammed in big drawers and in all sorts of boxes were fiddles; and yet this man, with the keen eye and determined look, struck out here and there, as much at home as though in a well-ordered drawing-room, never at a loss for a tool, never disarranging the (to him) order of his place, and never hampered by the immense heaps of things that would have driven the novice mad. The room was large, though crowded; and it had several benches in it, mostly covered with valuable limbs or bodies of instruments. The unoccupied floor-space was not large, but it was large enough to conceal a most cleverly contrived sort of cave, which, on the man pressing a hidden spring under his foot, revealed itself, as one of the boards slowly slid back. As the machinery ceased working, he stooped and took from the aperture a fine fiddle, and, carefully closing the hiding-place, sat down and most intently examined the instrument—head, belly, back, ribs, pur-

fling, varnish—all were long gazed at by the eye of a true expert; and the result of his investigation would seem to be most satisfactory, judging by the manner in which he set about *taking the whole thing to pieces!*

In case the true lover of the fiddle follows me with interest, he will not object to follow me still further whilst I show him how the instrument is taken to pieces and put together again. And he will, in doing so, see how a rascal can devote hour by hour, and the closest care and the finest talent, in furtherance of a deliberate fraud.

Mr. Touche, our foreigner, first takes a fine bow saw, and, inserting the steel under the fingerboard, cuts through the neck, and severs the head from the body. Then he takes a knife, similar to an oyster knife, made of the finest steel, and of a blunt sharpness and very thin. This he inserts under one of the corners of the belly, and very, very carefully draws the tool between belly and rib, and, going all over in this way, lifts off the sound-

board, or, as we say, the belly. He devotes fully an hour to gauging the top and bottom plates, or back and belly, and finding the thicknesses to his mind, proceeds to take out all the linings of ribs, end blocks, and corner blocks, which, I may go on to say, he afterwards replaces by others of a different character of wood and such as Stradivarius used. Then he takes off the bass bar, and replaces that. Going to the scroll, he cuts off the neck at the terminal and grafts on a new neck (all old ones are so treated, as the originals were too short). He works very rapidly, and has now done all requiring glue, and so replaces everything belonging to the poor fiddle in the secret place in the floor.

The following night he devotes to cleaning every particle of glue from the inside, finishing off with fine sand-paper, wetting all over his work with a sponge, and, when dry, going over it again with finer sand-paper, making all smooth as glass. It is needless to say that he scraped out every signature and

private mark, and that he took out the label and put one in its place taken from a secret drawer, where there were many such of all the celebrated old masters. The type was evidently of the old school, and the paper on which it was printed was also ancient, or professed to be. The label ran thus—

ANTONIUS STRADIUARIUS

CREMONENSIS FACIEBAT, A.D. 1715.

It was somewhat jagged at the edges, as though worn with age, and altogether had a very honest look with it.

Mr. Touche next takes to making many small damages inside, indenting here and there with a blunt tool, and making believe that one or two cracks had been most skilfully repaired by putting small pieces of pine over them and carefully finishing them off. And his next work is to put a thin wash of something all over the inside of the fiddle, which, when dry, gave it also an old, honest look, which was still more impressive after he had

rubbed an old cobweb here and there, and dirtied it in several places.

When the inner parts of the instrument had been all finished to his mind, Mr. Touche (I do not like this name) set about placing the belly on again. This is done by strong wooden cramps, most carefully covered with soft felt to keep the varnish from being chipped or in any way indented. Not too thick must be the glue inserted, and all that is superfluous must be washed off with a sponge, as the work proceeds. Soon this is done to his mind, and he next fashions the neck he newly grafted to the original head, making all smooth and beautifully finished. Until the body of the instrument is dry, as glued, he cannot mortise in the neck, so he rubs away at the head, wearing it here and there, especially at the right under side, where the volute begins to curl, as he knows that all Italian fiddles are so worn away, as it is a fact that the Italians rest the instrument on their tables when tuning. This, had he

overlooked it, would have found him out—but he is wise enough, is Mr. Touche.

For this night he has finished, so he replaces all once more in his hiding-place, locks up, and goes his way home.

CHAPTER VI

A Fire and its Consequences

IT is Saturday night, and we must now enter a very busy shop a few doors from that occupied by our clever Mr. Touche. It is a general fancy goods place, mostly light and fragile things, very large and fairly crammed with goods. It is crowded with buyers, mostly of the humble class, and we notice the fine form of one of those noble firemen of London, every man of them a hero should occasion arise for a display of heroism. This one is no exception, as it will be my anxious endeavour to show.

The wind was very high, and every time the door opened to allow of ingress or egress of buyers, streams of laces and thin gauzes hanging everywhere swayed about, and came

surely too near the gas jets—at least so thought our fireman, to judge by his constant look in that direction. He had at last got his small gifts for his little ones, and had just said to the master, ‘Seems to me, sir, those laces and things are too near those lights to be safe,’ when a fiercer gust than usual swept the laces right over the flame, and in an instant the cry of ‘Fire!’ was screamed by the startled crowd. And now you shall see what the strong will of one man can do in the presence of what was fast becoming utter confusion and helpless fright. The fireman was off duty, but what was that to him in the presence of danger, and of no ordinary danger? Putting his little things away in his coat, tenderly even then, for who could say what the next hour would see? he rushed to the main door and shouted, ‘Out, every one, except those working here—and you’ (to a fine young man), ‘fly in a hansom to our branch in Oxford Street—use all speed. You, sir’ (to the master), ‘have every

one of your workpeople upstairs out by the back—hurry! Good God! hand me every bucket you have—sharp! and fill as I empty—there! Now turn off the gas at the meter, and tear down everything that can spread the flame. May the Lord help us, but it is all no use!’ Working like ten men, he flung bucket after bucket of water on the now fast-spreading flames; here and everywhere in a moment, face black already with smoke and heat, but as brave as a lion, and cool, in spite of the growing danger. Even as he thus worked, the distant rumble of the engines was heard, and, such is the magnificent system of the brigade, the hose was to the mains in ten minutes from the breaking out of the fire. But the danger of a huge conflagration was very great, for on one side of this fancy shop, now blazing up to the third floor, was a chemist, and on the other an oil warehouse. No wonder that the street was soon alive with firemen, policemen, and even a detachment of mounted police, for an

enormous crowd had collected already, and a clear space was strictly to be kept for the free operations of these grand fellows.

Saturday night, fine, with a high wind ; no wonder London streets were thronged, and it soon becomes a very hard task for the policemen to keep back the eager people ; for *what* has such an absorbing interest as a fire ? And is there ever one in London without the inevitable costermonger, often the keenest wit present, and a desperate trial of temper to the policeman ? At any rate, there was at least one at the edge of the crowd, between whom and a ‘Robert,’ as the wit called him, there had been a smart passage of arms. ‘Blow me, six foot two, but you *aire* a stunner ! Mary won’t be waiting for you, Robert, not a bit of it. And he is so smiling over it all, and doesn’t sweat none this cold night and no fire ! Blest if they ar’n’t bringing him harf pint o’ stout ! *Do* take it, Robert, and we’ll soon have another. Won’t you run up to my place on Sunday

—we shall have Edward in the carriage at two, and there'll be missus and me in front, and a nice low seat behind—your legs will only bump now and then, Robert, and we'll trot off, and you *shall* call and see Mary! Now, who are *you* a-shoving of?' This latter was addressed to no other than our friend Touche, who, in a desperate state of mind, was vainly appealing to the policeman to allow him to go to his shop. But the thing could not be allowed, and he was in an agony, poor wretch, as he was only insured for a trifle, and he had thousands locked up in fiddles, etc.

But the fire has been localised, and one hears a word here and there that the danger is past, and there seems an intense relief in this to every one; for, had the flames spread, terrible might have been the destruction of property and of goods, which no money could replace.

About the last to leave the scene was our particular fireman, looking a sad figure, I

must say ; for he was one mass of dirt, and of damaged clothes. But he was unhurt, and he just touched his pocket to see that the little toys were still there, and prepared to walk home. But such a service as *he* had rendered was not to go unrewarded. As he gave one last look at the smouldering ruin, the master of the shop ran up to him, and, taking his hand warmly in both his own, said, ‘My friend, thank you ten thousand times for your great assistance, and for the manner in which you acted at first ; and again thank you, for I believe it is through you that not one of my workpeople is lost.’

‘Don’t name it, sir. I only did my duty.’

‘But you were off duty, were you not?’ asked the master.

‘Well, yes I was, sir ; but I suppose I am something like a terrier when he sees a rat—he *must* be at it—and so it is with me when I smell fire.’

‘At least, give me your name and address,’ which the fireman did ; and the upshot of it

was a cheque for £50, and promotion in the Brigade.

This incident of the fire is not in any way connected with my story, except that it led to what has a great deal to do with it, which was this:—As Mr. Touche at last tore himself away from the now almost quiet street, he met a gentleman who lived on the shores of dear old Windermere, and of whom we have before spoken, Mr. Bolton.

‘Eh! Mr. Bolton,’ said Mr. Touche, ‘what does bring *you* here?’

‘Why, I was in town, Touche,’ Mr. Bolton replied, ‘and, hearing of this fire in *your* street, I just ran here to see if you had been burned up. Anything fresh?’ The speaker was a man about twenty-eight years of age, over the average height, but was somewhat stout—not by any means of blue blood—on the contrary, he had a decidedly common look, was over-dressed, and carried ‘cash’ in every line of him.

Mr. Touche did not for a moment reply to

the inquiry 'Anything fresh?' (which, of course, applied to fiddles, be assured); but after about a minute had elapsed he said—

'Well, I have something—but I am, what you say, fearful?—it will make you cry out. It is very beautiful Strad., and the lowest cash down on the hammer is £500.'

'Gammon!' blurted out Mr. Bolton.

'What you call "Gammon"?' asked Mr. Touche.

'It is eaten with spinach, and is much affected by a gentleman of the name of Walker, and that person lives over the left.'

'I do not make you out, Mr. Bolton.'

'I dare say not, Touche. But in plain English, your price is too high for me.'

'But you should see the violin—nothing like it have you got, my dear sir—it is unique, scarce a scratch or crack of any consequence, though it has been well used, I can tell you. The price I have named is the lowest, so good-night to you, my good sir.'

Now, Bolton not only intended to see it, but to buy it, if approved; but he had not haggled on the Manchester and Liverpool exchanges for nothing, and moreover, he knew his man, so he just said—

‘Can I see it on Monday?’

‘No, it wants fitting all up, neck throwing back, and one or two minor repairs—but it shall be ready for you Thursday.’

‘I leave for home on Tuesday—say Tuesday morning?’

‘No, I cannot have it ready before Thursday.’ (The old rascal knew that very well.)

‘Let me see it as it is?’ said Mr. Bolton. ‘I can judge, you know, and the tone will be all right?’ But Mr. Touche would not give way, and the two parted with the understanding that one would show and the other would look at this unique Stradivarius.

How often does something of deep, deep moment hang on the careless utterance of a few words! And how often an apparently

trivial occurrence blasts the fame of some, the fortune of others, yet the same may be conducive to the uprising of that which is being held down by might and main! This perhaps threadbare and commonplace remark of mine comes up forcibly to me at the close of this chapter; for a piece of lace fluttering in the wind brought £50 and promotion to an honest fireman; it brought Mr. Touche helter-skelter back to his shop; and it brought also Mr. Bolton and the two latter face to face to discuss this fraud; and little did Mr. Bolton then think how some words then used would tell in a court of justice, whether for or against him remains to be seen.

The evenings of Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday following were devoted by Mr. Touche to the thorough 'doing up' of the (now) Strad., and the manner in which he inserted a piece here, and mended a crack there; how he threw out the wings of the sound-holes a trifle, and touched the edges of the ribs at the corners with black varnish

here and there, and on the volute of the scroll with the same (the finest real Strads have this peculiarity); and how he rounded off some parts of the edges, and finally gave the whole such a last master-touch of genius—is it any wonder the fiddle was now a perfect masterpiece of deception? And the scowl that passed over the face of Mr. Touche when he said, ‘There, you dam Englishman! that is another of your pets I have mauled for you! You set up for the “Modern Stradivari,” do you? I will tell you that I will serve all your instruments this way that I can get, and your green countrymen shall pay me my price for them.’ Saying which, he strung it up most carefully, and then put it away until the visit of Mr. Bolton.

That gentleman duly arrived on the morning of Thursday, and, after a long interval, bought and paid for the fiddle £450, for which he received an elaborate receipt, and several documents, most conveniently forged for the occasion by one of Touche’s many

tools—human tools this time—and so the fiddle passed into another hand.

And now we have done with London for a time ; we must once more go north, and take up our story at Windermere.

CHAPTER VII

The Detective

LORD WALTON and his sister had persuaded Sinclair to spend Christmas with them, on the condition that Isabel went to Ambleside and talked over Sir John to break through his severe rule of seeing no company; this had been done, and the old baronet was to be there on Christmas Eve. It wanted three days to the 24th, so this was spent in various ways — amongst the dogs, horses, cattle, and out shooting; early every evening the fiddles were ‘had out,’ be assured, and many was the trio gone through, and piano and violin, and piano and ‘cello duet, until the blending of the instruments was most perfect.

Do you understand this exquisite blending

of various stringed instruments, reader ? It is not only that every note and cadence is perfect as to time ; but there is a hidden something that touches the chords, and we have the deep diapason and the delicate upper partial tones added to those actually produced by the players ; and we have the dominants standing out like bars of light in a landscape ; and we have the tender absorption of a wandering tenth by the ever-watchful, loving harmony, until the whole glory of music ravishes the soul.

There is more, much more, in music than just a passing fancy. There is, to me, food for the soul, and an elevator of the whole being. But so much, nowadays, goes by the name of music that is nothing of the sort, that it is no wonder we hear of concert after concert being gone through, leaving no trace behind of the culture of the listeners ; and I sincerely urge those who might effect a change to try and do so, by giving less and of a better sort, and by employing only those

who are musicians in every sense of the word to render it.

. . . .

On the morning of the 23rd the Detective arrived, and the particulars of the robbery of the fiddle, and the contemplated one of the plate, were conveyed to him by Lord Walton himself, privately. The officer asked very few questions, but what he *did* ask were most pertinent, and he soon seemed to have well weighed every point, as he said—

‘Thank you, my lord. I am now, if you please, your lordship’s under-butler, nominally to assist Mr. Thompson, but in reality—to do what I like. It will be necessary to fit myself out for this—have I your consent to go to your market town, Ulverston, to do this?’

‘Certainly—I give you *carte blanche*, and make yourself as comfortable as you can, but track the thing if you can, as it worries me.’

‘And I shall want that fiddle that was found in the box—my large overcoat has

many pockets ; and whilst I am away I may learn something.'

'By all means,' said his lordship ; 'I will see that you have it. Now, I shall hand you over to Thompson, whom you will find a good fellow.'

After Mr. Jones (the officer was so called) had partaken of a substantial meal in the butler's pantry, the first thing he said was—

'Is the roof slated or leaded ?'

'Leaded,' said Thompson, 'and flat.'

'Then please show me up there at once, and let no one see me go.'

This Thompson soon did, accompanying him to the roof. When there, Mr. Jones carelessly gazed at the exquisite view of lake and mountain ; the grand reach of the lower end of the former, and the snow-clad summits of the latter, seemed to afford little or no pleasure to this worm of cities. In fact, he put his hands in his pockets and began whistling, walking slowly round the outer edge of the roof, lazily kicking a projection

here and there, but seeming to have no motive in doing so. 'So you never found the rope, nor ever heard again of it?' he asked Thompson presently.

'No, and we've been up here dozens of times, and everywhere,' said the butler.

'Just so,' said Jones, stopping suddenly at an obscure corner. 'Run down and bring me a hammer and chisel—quick.'

On Thompson reappearing with these tools, Mr. Jones knelt down on the roof, and very carefully proceeded to inspect a part of it. He was not long before he began to unroll a long, narrow slip, that had evidently been lately cut, and most neatly welded together again, disclosing the rope he wanted, tied round with a red handkerchief with white and yellow borders.

'There, Mr. Thompson, that pays for the good cheer you just now gave me.'

'Well, I never!' was all Thompson could say.

'And now get me across to the railway

station, as I find there is a train at one o'clock. And see that the fiddle his lordship gave you for me is put by you in my big topcoat inside pocket, and expect me back by the seven o'clock train from Ulverston, and get me over from the other side.' Saying all this rapidly, but with no energy at all—in fact, quite indolently, so to speak, from his manner—Mr. Jones followed the admiring Thompson, and was soon rowed across the lake to the railway station.

When in Ulverston he went first to one ironmonger and then another, to see if he could match the rope he had found on the roof of Lord Walton's house. His real object, of course, was to trace what he had by him to where it had originally come from, and at last he was directed to a rope-walk as the most likely place.

'Yes, we have some like this; in fact, this came from here—peculiar make—sold it to Lord Walton's man, Reynolds, some days ago. How much do you want?'

Mr. Jones said ten yards, which, having got, he next made his way to see if he could sell the fiddle he had with him. Dear old Ulverston! (? Ulpha's stone) it was too sleepy to buy fiddles; but at last a pawnbroker said—

‘Why, I sold this a few days ago to a man who said he was going south. Queer! Oh no, I don’t mind telling you what he gave for it—15s. I’ll give you 10s.’

‘No,’ said Mr. Jones, ‘I won’t take that. But could you swear to this coming from you?’

‘Quite certain it came from here. He was a tallish man who bought it, and he had a face I should know again anywhere. Stay; it was (looking at his books) on (such a day), and it was market-day, for we were busy—Thursday.’

‘Then you won’t give more than 10s.?’ asked Mr. Jones.

‘Nothing, sir,’ said the man, and he turned to serve somebody else.

Mr. Jones seemed to consider, but he ultimately left the shop, apparently quite satisfied that business had not been done.

He felt so far sure of his man at least as to identity, and all he had to do was to watch well, because he had as yet not an atom of *proof*—all was circumstantial, but clearly pointing to Reynolds. Be it observed, no one had in any way drawn his attention to any particular person as likely to be the culprit, and he was far too deep to let out what he knew to any one as yet. So he whiled away his time in quaint Ulverston, passing up and down its most peculiar back streets, alleys, and courts—‘built first and planned after,’ as I once heard said of Keswick,—and then he returned to Lake Side by the seven-o’clock train.

CHAPTER VIII

Christmas at Ghyll Foot

AT length December 24th arrived, and all was activity at Lord Walton's, for they kept up the festive season merrily here; and from Lady Isabel to the small lass who peeled potatoes, and from Lord Walton down to the cow-boy on the home farm, every one was active and joyous, and it was 'How do,' and 'Won't we have a time,' etc., etc., all through the day. There was already much company in the house, and more even expected. Sir John Sinclair had not yet come. But he is now entering the hall, and most heartily Lord Walton, Lady Isabel, and his nephew welcome him.

'How good of you, my dear friend, to come,' said Lady Isabel, and she almost

embraced the fine old man, and the others were equally delighted to see him.

‘Ah! Jack,’ he said, ‘you sent a rare wheedler when you put this lady on me! It was neither he said nor she said, but come I must, and nothing would serve but I was to rub up some of my fiddling, mark that, and particularly some Scotch reels and strathspeys! Well, well, God help us all,’ and it would seem as though memory here suddenly diverted his thoughts to the long past, which, quickly perceiving, Lady Isabel skilfully turned them with—

‘You know how we all delight to make this a truly happy time, and you would not, I am sure, begrudge us the pleasure of having you, after so long?’

‘No, my dear girl, far be it from me to be a wet blanket; besides, if I did sit in a corner and sulk, that rascal of a Jack would more than cut me out.’

‘Indeed, that I would. You know you can’t touch “Tullochgorum” with me, nor

yet these north-country ditties, and Bell here can turn a wrist pretty well now, so look out ; and no one can give us " John Peel " like Bob here, so truly you will have to " pipit " finely, ye ken.'

Sir John laughed at his comical nephew, and all were glad to see the old gentleman in such good case.

They now repaired to the drawing-room, one blaze of light and elegance, and of bright, happy faces, *not* all county-people, be it at once observed, for there were many there whom it delighted Lord Walton to honour, and he made it a rule to ask whomsoever he thought proper to his table, and he often said that *brains* and *trains* did not always bestride the same horse.

There was a little surprise which Lord Walton had prepared for his friend Jack Sinclair, and he now conducted him to the library, before the splendid fire of which room stood a man of medium height, of an intellectual countenance, and whose age might be

anything from forty-five to fifty-five years; and seated in a grand old oak chair beside him was another, some fifty years of age, whose massive features glowed in the light of the fire, every line full of humour, and every inch of the face full of true humanity.

When the door opened, Jack stood in mute wonder, first regarding one and then the other of these two, and then he made a rush and gave them both a hearty slap on the shoulder; then he fell to, and such a shaking of hands had not been seen in that room for some time.

‘Well, I *am* considerably blowed, as the balloon said! Why’ (to the first named), ‘*is* it Blane? and can it possibly’ (to the other) ‘be “T’owd Fossil?” Well, Bob, this is good of you, indeed! Now we *will* have a high time of it, or I know nothing of fiddles. But how on earth did you both manage to run the blockade at home? Did you take French leave, or did the women-folk let you off, eh?’

‘Well, Mr. Sinclair, if the truth must be told, I, for one, ran the gauntlet; but it’s all

right, I'm insured.' This was said by "T'owd Fossil," so-called in Barnsley, his home, but whose name was Mutchinson. Mr. Blane, our violin-maker, gave a merry laugh, and said it was all right; she knew he was out! 'But this is a vexatious affair about your fiddle, Mr. John,' he further said, 'and I very much fear by this time it is in the hands of the vampires; you have no news, I suppose?'

'No, none whatever; but I'll follow the thing up, be assured. Man' (to Mr. Mutchinson), 'it was such a fiddle! Such power and quality! and it was just perfection.'

'I'll keep a sharp look-out in Yorkshire,' said Mr. Mutchinson, 'and wire you if there is the least wind of the thing. Strad. model, you say, and flat?'

'Yes, and as true a copy, without being slavish, as ever man produced.'

'Now, Mr. John, don't make me blush,' said Blane.

'Nay, my good sir, you'll never have to blush over a work like that,' interposed Lord

Walton. 'But we had better see what the others are doing. This is a day for five o'clock dinner, sharp and quick, as we give all our night and energies to the fun afterwards,' and he led them to the drawing-room.

Early in the afternoon of the same day the preparations in the servants' quarter of the hospitable mansion were advancing finely towards completion, and all was good-nature, bustling, and keen anticipation of a jolly time. Thin, wiry old Thompson and his 'new man' were hard at it at the plate, etc. ; every spare man and woman was decorating the whole lower part of the house with holly, mistletoe, and choice laurel ; and as for cook and her helps, they looked like full moons twenty yards off. Such a roasting, boiling, stewing, and baking you seldom saw, and it showed the heat of the huge fire in the kitchen when the numerous dogs about could not come within yards of it, and *they* were pretty well seasoned, I can tell you.

'Drat thor dogs,' snapped cook ; 'I'd as

near gone flop over yan o' thim as macks nea matter.'

'Ye'd ha gittin a trade-mark an' ye had, Betty,' said one of the girls.

'Thee howd thy clatter, barn, and get summat done, or we's niver git tidied up,' and as cook said this she took a brush and fairly swept dogs, cats, and people 'out o' geat,' as she called it. But all was done in such prime good-humour that even the swept away dogs went into their corners without a snarl.

'And what hast thou supposed to ha gittin 'i thor baskets?' next asked cook of a small boy who just then came in from one of the gardens.

'Cowcumbers an' ingins and sich like. My! but that's warrm!' said the boy, holding up his hands three yards from the big fire.

'And tell that mon 'at sent thor, we's want ten steane mair taties, and be off. Here, tak that, an' let dogs a-be,' saying which cook gave the lad a tart, and he, taking a huge

bite (nearly all of it), simply said, 'My!' and departed.

Just at this moment Thompson came into the servants' hall or kitchen (for it was both, and an enormous room) and asked an uncommonly pretty housemaid, named Polly, to send some one to Captain Simpson with a request that he would have the ice for the wine brought in at once. And it so happened that Mr. John Sinclair's man, Johnie, came in at the moment, and said he would go, as he had 'nowt to do hissel.' This young man was a character—a thorough good sort, north country to the backbone, and honest as steel, strong as a horse, and, if it were possible, more alive to a joke than even his master, and that is saying something. Before going he ogled Polly a bit, and helped himself to a tart; however, this set cook on him.

'Well, of all th' imperent ne'er-do-weels!' she exclaimed. 'Git out an' send up that ice, or I'se tak besom till t' softest part about ye.'

‘That’s my heead, Betty; fire away,’ and he ducked down and gave a good run at her. Well, it was some hollowish part he hit, for she gave a great gasp, as though all her spare wind had gone, staggered a bit, and finally darted for her brush, and there was a pretty scamper after Master Johnie, and a roaring laugh all over the servants’ hall, in which cook had at last to join. But she said, ‘I’s e pay him yet, and thee too’ (to Polly), ‘thou hizzie!’ which only set them off again. Then the head coachman came in and planted himself right before the fire, and faced the lot, saying to cook, ‘Morning, cook, ’morning.’

‘Arternoon, an’ it please yer honour. Gocks! but ye mak yersel quite at heam, and ye’ll mak a rare hastener an’ ye only bide a bit. Some o’ yer wenches gie the man some swipes; he’s fair faint wi’ ower mich wark! an’ a pipe o’ baccy, an’ summat in a papper for t’ eat on t’ road heam! Lauving days! what a nice man ’tis, to be sure! Sich a help ’til a body he is! an’ so handy like!’

‘Now, cook, do be a bit decent wi’ a chap,’ said the coachman. ‘Hang me, I never come in to have a bit of a warm, but ye go at me like a bull at a red rag. (Thank you, my love; that slips down nicely.) And ye should be a bit careful; there’s that new chap fro’ t’ south; he’s a rare un, and ye’re not wedded yet, ye know, Betty.’

Betty gave a glare, and no end of a toss with her head; but what she was evidently bent on saying was cut short by the opening of the outer door, letting in a great gust of wind and the head only of the second gardener. ‘Merry Christmas, cook,’ said the gardener; ‘was it ten stone of taties or twenty?’

‘Oh, drat it; come in an’ shut that door! Blest if a boddy is to hev a haporth o’ peace to-day! Ay, but ye’re sly, mister gardiner, for all ye look sae meek. Fill him a pint, Polly. Yes, I said ten steane, an’ I wish ye hed cooking of ’em.’

‘Never mind, Betty, I’ll help to eat ’em instead,’ said the gardener.

‘Ye needna tell us that, dunderhead. But there’s ae comfort, if ye do eat thor taties ye’ll hev to dance an’ sing an’ mak yersel useful for ance i’ yer life. Whisht now.’ Here the housekeeper entered the place, and all was decorum once more.

CHAPTER IX

Songs, etc.

WELL, the early dinner is over, the gentlemen have once more joined the ladies in the drawing-room, and the general expectation of a 'merry night of it' seems in a fair way of being realised, if one may judge by the distant sounds of bustle, and the occasional merry laugh echoed through the grand old pile, and by the preparations of Lady Isabel to make a move towards the servants' hall. Jack had a joke for Bell, which seemed to rather upset her, for she did not respond, and Jack seemed put out. But he presently marched off with a very handsome young lady, light-hearted as ever; and, the others following, the servants' hall was soon a most gay and animated scene.

Mistletoe was secretly put over the most frequented places, and many was the stolen kiss and the amazed scream thereat by the by no means displeased ladies, though they gave it out otherwise ; and every one seemed to expand. Our friend Mr. Mutchinson fairly beamed again, and if there was one merrier corner than another, it was ever where he and Jack Sinclair were ‘carrying on,’ as cook said. There were no half-measures here. If the fire had been considered large about three o’clock, it was one mass of huge logs now, and the dogs gave it a very wide berth indeed.

And in a vast semicircle sat the whole of the household and guests, master and man, mistress and maid, all for the time socially equal, and sincerely well disposed one to the other. It was a truly pleasant sight ; and when old Thompson himself brought in a huge bowl of punch, and set it, with its silver ladles, on a settle opposite the fire, and near it, on another settle, some fifty glasses, and then took his seat among the rest, there was a perfect

buzz of delight. But, as a lot had to be gone through before supper, Lord Walton said—

‘My dear friends, one and all, I am most pleased to see you, and hope that you will all do your best to turn care out of doors, and fall-to with me in promoting hilarity. We have a stiff programme to go through, so I propose we begin.’ The first thing voted was a ‘jorem o’ that het punch,’ by the oldest man present, a grand old example of the Westmorland dalesman, and Lord Walton’s favourite tenant. This was readily seconded and carried, each one helping himself out of the punch-bowl, and it was a treat to watch the maids sip a drop here and there out of the tumblers of the gentlemen, the farmers, and the servants. As for ‘T’ owd Fossil,’ he had a rare time of it, for Lady Isabel was on his right and Lady Cavendish on his left, and there he was, a spoonful here and a spoonful there, and a roar of laughter between each, the tears trickling down his dear honest

face, and the ladies fairly holding their sides.

And the old rascal had such a twinkle in his eye ; he now and then gave a few bars of an old ditty, in a rich deep bass voice ; until at last both the ladies declared that it was too bad, for they dared neither look, nor think, and could hardly speak, and the pain in their sides was killing them. And Jack Sinclair was, if possible, worse than he ; for he had got both the dogs, Lion and Rat, each sitting up before him, one on a chair, the other on his haunches on the floor ; and if he wasn't actually giving each a spoonful, dog after dog, making their eyes wink ; and he told them to wag their tails, which of course they *could not* do ; and he told them to put out their tongues, which they *would not* do, until the crowd of all sorts around him fairly shouted again with laughter.

But the time is getting on, and so must we.

A game of Trencher was next begun, real

bona fide forfeits, each to be properly redeemed, or sacrificed, the spoil to be afterwards sold by auction, to wind up the whole business. This made every one very merry, and Lord Walton insisted on the wooden trencher being properly twirled in the centre, and not in corners away from those called. And each person, old or young, had to take the name of some vegetable or flower, and, when called upon by the name taken, to answer to the trencher. It will be at once seen that there was scope for rare sport here. The first thing to be done was to fit each person with a name, and the roars of laughter when such as Thompson got 'Cowcumber'; Lord Walton, 'Cabbage-head'; Lady Isabel, 'Bummelkite'; Mr. Jones, 'Crab-apple'; Jack Sinclair, 'Dog-daisy,' etc., etc., not forgetting T'owd Fossil, 'Blush Rose'—I say the roars of laughter shook the old mansion, and could be heard actually to the lake. And to see old Thompson walk calmly up when called, and make a dive at the trencher before

it fell, but who was fined as it slipped out of his fingers; and the old Dalesman, see him catch it like a young man; and Mr. Jones miss his footing and roll over; and how Jack Sinclair was fined three times for ‘cheating,’ as the ladies said; and how ‘T’owd Fossil,’ in making a rush when called, upset his chair and himself together;—and, not least of all, how cook, too fat to stoop so low, quietly *sat down* and collared the thing before it fell! The forfeits, all collected, were to be redeemed after supper, and this ended Trencher.

After a while, Lord Walton called for a song or two, and the old Dalesman gave ‘D’ye ken John Peel?’ to the violin obligato of his lordship; Jack gave ‘Three Kisses,’ which, as the reader has not before heard the words, we repeat:—

I kissed her hand—what joy for me!
I kissed her cheek—what ecstasy!
I kissed her lips, when, opening wide,
All heaven before me seemed to glide.

I wedded her—'twas heaven confirmed
As shone the moon of honey termed ;
But premature was its decay—
It passed, and took my heaven away.

And with fair heaven my angel went ;
But o'er their loss I'll ne'er lament ;
For they have left behind, their life
To shine resplendent in—the wife.

There was a great round of applause after this ; and Lady Isabel's eyes softened so beautifully as her gaze for a moment met that of the singer, that Jack asked her if she liked it—that was all—the old donkey ! blind as a bat—quite. Then Isabel gave , On the Banks of Allan Water,' and Mr. Jones this ditty :—

Mary Ann Jones has very big bones,
Tho' she's not much flesh, and she isn't very fresh ;
But she's got a little pile, so I do a little smile
As I goes past her house with my barr—o.

And I thought that all was right, until the other night
When I saw a Grenadier there a-drinking of his beer,
With his arm around her waist, and she often got a taste
Of his swipes and his kisses, to my horr—o.

Oh, blow the thing, says I ; when next I have a shy
At any one with tin, I'll make my book to win ;
And your Alfred you may take that there shan't be
any rake

Of a sojer there to fill my heart with sorr—o.

The gentry were greatly amused at this, given as only a Londoner could give it ; and the humbler guests and the servants fairly 'fidgeted again wi' glee,' as Johnie said ; and the old Dalesman slapped Mr. Jones on the back and said, 'I's tell ye what, me lad—thoo's a spanker ! gie me thee hont !' And he held out a paw about the size of a shoulder of lamb, and gave Mr. Jones a proper squeeze—at least Mr. Jones thought so. And here let me, once for all, remark that Mr. Jones watched the man Reynolds as cat never watched mouse, but the closest observer never would for a moment suppose that such was the case ; but it was a fact, nevertheless ; and that he would 'run him to earth' sooner or later he felt quite certain, though he never for a second grew careless in vigilance.

Our friend Blane next gives a recitation

from Shakespeare's 'Cassius to Brutus,' beginning—

‘For, once upon a raw and gusty day,’

which he delivered with care and judgment, and was roundly applauded. Sir John Sinclair afterwards gave something original:—

The wailing winds a mournful tale
 Rehearsed unto the waves
 As they rolled upon the shore,
 As a fair young bride they bore,
 And the lover wildly raves,
 Or joins the wind in its mournful wail.

A dream ! it is a hateful dream,
 For she I thought was dead
 Now lives within these trembling arms,
 My breast beneath her head.
 And we together gently sigh,
 And heart to heart replies,
 As roar the billows at our feet,
 As loud the tempest cries.

The old baronet sang this magnificently, the first verse being in the minor, the second in the major; and a thrill passed through many there as he finally wrought up the two

last lines as though the cry of the storm really could be heard.

Then 'T' owd Fossil' winds up the singing with 'The days when we went Gipsying,' which he chaunted in a glorious bass voice, accompanying himself on the fiddle; and I very much question whether such a rendering of the dear old song was ever before heard in that or any other house in the Lake Country. The storm of applause was so great that there was nothing for it but he must sing again, and he gave 'The Bonny English Rose,' likewise with great effect and applause. One of the dalspeople said, 'Dash my buttons, but thoo's gittin a rare pipe, auld chap! Gocks! but I'd gang ower Gimmershow ony neet 'tween this and neist Cursmas to hear thee again. Fill up, auld lad, and God be wi' ye!' To a dweller in a town, the heartiness of this outburst was quite surprising; but our dear old friend Mutchinson seemed greatly pleased, as were all present.

As the laying of the supper would take

some little time, it was arranged to give the Andante movement from Hadyn's string quartette 'God preserve the Emperor,' in the drawing-room, and thither repaired all who cared to do so. The players were soon deep in this exquisite melody and its variations, so beautifully intertwined; and the rapt attention of those who listened testified to the great enjoyment they experienced, whether of connoisseur or novice.

But now the gong sounds, and the immense table in the servants' hall is soon crowded with real happy faces; and a perfect Babel of tongues prevails—real, *bona fide*, out and out talk, meant to be heard by every one, if need be, and not a vestige of ill-nature in word, look, or action. As to what was *on* the table—really you must excuse me—I am quite unequal to the task; all I know is, that what was on pretty soon was off—somewhere, and the disappearance of each mouthful was the prelude to sallies of wit and lively repartee. If any one was inclined

to be too much occupied with his plate, some one would say, 'Don't take it so to heart, man—she'll say "yes" next time,' at which there was a very conscious look on the part of the eater, or some one else—no matter who, for no particular person was meant, and herein how much may we express !

Lord Walton was busy with a group at his end of the table describing an episode of the last hunt ; Jack Sinclair was hard at it about fiddles and fiddlers ; 'T'owd Fossil' was trolling out an old ditty between courses, beaming all over, as young as any of them ; Betty was in high feather, but, for all that, she had just given Master Johnie a warning look, which that imp took for what *he* considered it worth—and so on, and so on. Then Jack called up to Isabel, 'Will you give us that bit you said would keep, Lady Isabel—the other day, you may remember?' At which she began to laugh, and said, 'Well, it was this :—

'Your wife was ill a few days ago, Joseph'

(to one of the tenants), ‘and I called to see if I could be of any service to her. Sitting on the doorstep was a very quaint little girl—one of Robinson’s girls,—who, it appeared, was a sort of guard set to watch during the temporary absence of a woman who was nursing your wife. It was a wet day, and the little one had evidently had orders to let no one up to see your wife but those who *took off their clogs!* She said to me, “Yer can’t gang up bout yer tak off yer clogs—Mrs. Scraggs’ll be mad if yer do.” I said I would wipe my shoes well — please let me. “Well,” she said, “ur’ll be mad, but I reckon yer’ll hev to gang up till her.” So up I went, and ill as your wife was, I found her laughing, for she had heard every word.’

This was well received, as, indeed, would anything much less pithy—for all were most kindly disposed one to another. Mr. Mutchinson said he could give them a pretty good one, if they had a mind for a Yorkshire yarn. An old miser of a woman near

Peniston was tormented out of her life about her money, and did all she could to throw every one off the scent as to where she hid her treasure. So she hit on this at last. An old well near served her purpose so far, that she often went to it, and seemed in an anxious way every time she left it.

One night, at edge of dark, she went and dropped something down the well, and hastily marched off. ‘Noo we have thee, owd wench!’ exclaimed a chap who had been watching many a bit. ‘Come on, ye felleys—here’s a reap an a grappel—by th’ mon, bo’ we’s i’ luck! dunnot thee barst thysel, Tim, wi’ that lorfin—thoo’ll mebbey want thy wint i’ now.’

They gathered about the mouth of the well, and let down the rope. Presently the first speaker said, ‘I have it, poo softly, or we’s get nowt but padducks.’ Well, as they didn’t care to catch frogs, they *did* pull softly, and at length brought to the surface an old bonnet tied up in an old shawl. ‘Now thee, Tim, strike a leet,’ which he did. They then

opened the shawl, and inside the bonnet were several old stockings, filled with odds and ends of almost everything but money or treasure. Tim looked, as he was, like a fool; the others about the same; and the spokesman merely said, 'a gradeley sell, by th' mon.'

After this there were several speeches, toasts, and one or two more anecdotes, etc. Then some one said, 'Hush!—the waits.' The fiddlers, and those fond of the fiddle, pricked their ears, for the sounds of the tuning-up of a 'cello, double bass, and fiddles was heard outside on the lawn nearest to where they were at supper. This had been arranged and timed by Lord Walton, so that, whilst they sat there, they should hear the grand old tunes sung and played, and afterwards the players should keep them going with merry dances.

All was hushed as the sublime *Adeste Fideles* was given; following which 'While shepherds watched their flocks by night,' and finally 'Christians, awake!' It would be impossible for me to give you any idea of the

effect of this music on the listeners: to say that there had descended on that merry group a spell would be only simply to state that which was true;—but it was in the manner of *how* each was touched that was so noticeable—some all smiles; some open-mouthed; some, with a holy sadness, intent on every note; and the cynic may have his laugh if he likes, but on one or two cheeks there was a tear! Well, I must let each listen and enjoy in his own way—my business is to record.

When the music had ceased, the players and singers entered and were loudly applauded, and sat down at a side-table to supper. As they came in, Mr. Jones behaved in a most singular manner. First he murmured, ‘Ha!’ then ‘Hum!’ then ‘Just so—exactly!’ and then all rose from the table, and there was a clearance for dancing. He slipped out, and presently gave, unseen by any one, a slip of paper to Thompson, on which was written, ‘For your life, keep quiet, and

do not on any account allow Reynolds leave of absence, or to sleep out until I speak further. There is a man *I know* just come in as one of the fiddlers. Burn this.' Poor old Thompson felt somewhat mystified, but he was equal to the occasion, and kept his countenance.

CHAPTER X

Ghost Stories

AS a sort of quiet digester, and before the dance commenced, the forfeits from the game of trencher were redeemed, Lady Isabel being the one chosen to call them out, and Jack Sinclair was to dole out the punishment.

‘What is to be done to the owner of this?’ Lady Isabel asks; then Sinclair inquires (his head is on her lap, as he kneels before her), ‘Fine or superfine?’ (*i.e.* man or woman.)

‘Superfine.’

‘Well, she must do’ (so-and-so). But it is not my intention to wade through all these forfeits: there were one or two good points, and I will give them.

‘What are we to do with the owner of this?’

‘Fine or superfine?’

‘I hardly know,’—looking round.

Jack looked up, ‘Oh! it’s a lady’s——’

‘Please, my lady, don’t believe a word he says,’ hotly interrupted Polly; ‘it’s nothing of the sort—it’s my waistband!’

‘Oh, oh!’ thought Jack, ‘I’ll make you pay for that, Miss Polly.’ Then aloud, ‘She must stand in the middle of the room and spell “opportunity.”’

Polly innocently did as she was told, and began, getting as far as ‘ni,’ when Jack rushed up and said, ‘No, you don’t divide the syllables right—again.’ ‘O-p, p-o-r, t-u, n-i, t-y.’ As she said ‘t-y’ Jack had her like a vice in his arms, and gave her a sounding kiss. Poor Polly! she was fairly shamed; and that Johnie got his ears well boxed for saying to her, ‘Thoo should ha’ held thee tongue about waistband—master did it o’ purpose, an’ sarve thee reet.’ But he looked so loving at her the while, that she let it pass.

There was a forfeit of Mr. Mutchinson’s,

and he was sentenced to 'shy widow.' And there he sat, first one lady and then another being brought up and refused; then again and again, until nearly every one, servants and all, had failed to captivate him—but on he sat, and smirked and simpered, until at last cook was had up, when he gave a great bounce; and he cuddled and hugged her, and kissed her and nearly smothered her, amidst one universal roar of laughter. And the laugh became deafening as cook said as soon as she could be heard, 'I's niver mak thy supper again while I's wick, tho' auld gommerhead of a poddish bason'; but she could not help laughing later on, though she said after to him as she passed to her seat, 'Ay, but yo Yorkshire folk do know how to clip women, choose how!'

Lord Walton was heard to say, between one of his fits of laughter, that if this sort of work went on he should have to go to bed, for he couldn't stand it! Laugh! why, Job himself would have burst; and if Judas

Iscariot had only had a night or two of this sort he'd never have been the rascal he was! not he!

When this forfeit business had come to an end, Lord Walton said, 'In mercy let us settle down to a ghost story, or something of the sort, or I shall give it up—I'm sore all over.' But just then he caught sight of 'T'owd Fossil' kneeling before the scullery-girl, twanging a fiddle like a guitar, and singing some love rubbish, a lot of people roaring around him, and Master Rat, the terrier, perched on his shoulder (put there by Jack). And this, of course, set him off again, until Lady Isabel looked a little anxious, and asked dear old Mutchinson to please give over, or every one would be dead.

They got round the fire again as before, another jorum of punch was brought by Thompson, and Sir John Sinclair gave them the first ghost story.

'When a young man of nineteen, I was invited to spend Christmas with a dear friend

of mine in the extreme north of Scotland. To get to the old mansion where lived Sir James Ross, with his wife, a son, and two daughters, we had to travel by an old Highland stage on leaving the railway, and I was considerably astonished on mounting the box seat by the driver to be asked, "Was I ganging till the Deevil?"

"Not I, driver; why do you ask?"

"Mon, an' ye be for Ross's, as they say ye aire, ye be ganging till Auld Hornie and his imps, as ye'll find; an' if ye no' be louping dykes i' yer sark afore cock-crow, ye'll be t'only yan as got sae muckle weel off."

"I was no fool, and, I am quite sure, no coward, but I didn't quite like this. The son of the baronet and I were great friends; but I knew nothing of his father and his sisters—but what did I care? I told the driver he was a "gowk," but he only said, "Ye'll see—ye'll see"; and see I did, as you shall hear.

"I arrived, and was most kindly welcomed

by all, the two sisters being fine girls ; and they showed at once that they knew a shy fool from a man who had seen something of the world. What I have to tell is not likely to be believed, but it is every word true, on my honour. We had spent a most happy evening, and I was conducted to my bedroom on the second floor by my friend, and was soon fast asleep—or I thought so.

‘But just as the old clock in the north turret gave out its iron note of one, I heard a sound near me as though a hundred watch springs had suddenly taken leave of their senses and were all going off at once ! Such a whirring ! now like the wail of a doomed soul, now a sort of click, click, click, then off again, and again. I told you I ’was no coward, but, believe me, I felt as I had never felt before ; and I thought of the old driver and what he said about leaping hedges, etc., and about Old Hornie, etc., until I was bathed in perspiration,—I ’ll not deny it.

‘Some of you look a bit scared, and no

wonder; but fancy me in that old house, in one of the wildest parts of North Scotland, where it was said the Devil lived, and black one o'clock in the morning, hearing such unearthly sounds as I did, and you will forgive what followed. The rasping, the sighing, and the click, click, click went on until I could bear it no longer, but got out of bed, dressed anyhow, and rushed out of the room; but, as I got just past the open door, I fell full length over some obstruction in the landing. And, horror of horrors! there arose from an adjoining bedroom such a wild peal of laughter that I fairly gave up, and fainted.

‘When I came to I was in bed, my friend supporting my head on his breast, and Sir James holding a stiff glass of hot whisky to my mouth. He got a lot down somehow, and I, in a scared sort of way, asked Bob “what was up?”

“Nothing, old chap—you’re all right now—dreaming a bit, I suppose—you’re all right.” But as I saw two or three half-dressed maids

come in with hot bottles, etc., I thought otherwise. I felt too dazed to think much. But just then I heard the two sisters inquire outside the door, "O papa! *is* he better? We are so frightened."

"You go to bed again, you huzzies," rasped Sir James; "and if you come any more of your pranks I'll cut every blessed hair off your heads for you! Hang me, were it not too early for nettles, if I wouldn't make your sweet bodies tingle, ay, and I will yet, by the Lord Harry!—so look out."

'I thought I heard a soft titter as a reply; but as I showed signs of sleep, they all left me, and I awoke next morning none the worse. And I may say that the young ladies were very demure when I met them, and they said they were greatly sorry that what they had thought a harmless bit of fun should have ended so. All they had done was this;—several reels of cotton were placed in a box under my bed, and the end of each passed through a hole of the box, and conveyed under

the carpets to their bedroom, where, of course, they unwound them, making the noises I heard,—and that was the ghost.’

‘Well,’ said Lord Walton, ‘I will just give you another short one, and then for dancing. Some years ago there lived an eccentric old gentleman in a house on the other side of the Lake—where you now reside, Mr. Watson. I am sorry to be obliged to say that all over this part of the country it was a regular thing for young lads, ay, and men too, to play practical jokes after dark; and it had gone so far, that a more daring one than any got up a ghost, and really frightened some so much that they would not go about at all after dark. And this get-up was the whole skin of a cow, horns and all, with a man’s head under; and he always spread his arms out and gave a sort of bellow.

‘Well, this old gentleman got to hear of this, and he said he wished that ghost would pay him a visit,—he’d settle it. And the end was terribly tragic; for the daring fellow

went one night to the front entrance of the house, gave several bellows and unearthly groans, upon which the half-witted old gentleman rushed out with a huge oak stick, and literally dashed out the brains of the cow, as he thought, but which were those of the poor, misguided practical joker.'

'And what was done to the gentleman?' asked Mr. Blane.

'There was a trial, but no jury in the world could have brought it in against the gentleman. Counsel urged with unanswerable logic, *he struck at a cow*—how on earth was he to know there was a man under the skin?'

After this there seemed a sort of a fidgeting to have taken possession of the people, so there was a general clearance, and dancing began.

Now, north-country dancing is no child's play; none of your 'going for a walk' through a quadrille, but real energetic exercise, with, as I once heard a young lady—yes, a young lady—say, 'plenty of bounce in it'; and the

company with which I have to deal entered thoroughly into the spirit of it on this occasion ; and they got through some stiff work before they began to flag somewhat, which brought on a six (Scotch) reel, in which figured Sir John Sinclair, Jack, Lord Walton, Lady Isabel, etc., etc., and 'T'owd Fossil' fiddled singly, after which Lord Walton took his place, and *vice versa*; and then began some fun, for our Yorkshire friend did his utmost to go through all the steps ; and the Highland fling done by him was something to see.

They had actually to stop twice to allow Jack to have his laugh out—and who could have helped laughing ? for the old gentleman was as serious over his work as the others, in contrast, were merry ; he seemed thoroughly to mean business ; and when Sinclair stopped to hold his sides, the 'owd lad' looked quite surprised, as though he would have said, 'What's up?' And then came on the inevitable country dance, and then Sir Roger de Coverley.

Ay, and they *did* dance it, too! But I must not omit to tell you that just before they began this latter, and when they were all in their two long rows facing, Mutchinson called out to the band, 'Now, you chaps, rosin up, and let those fiddles have it hot,' which served to set all off in merriment. And presently fast and furious it became—tramp, tramp, tramp, every one going—arms, legs, body, head, and shoulders, all on the move; left hand top meets right hand bottom, a bow, back to places; right hand top and left hand bottom ditto; same repeated, giving left hand—ditto, giving right; then both hands and a whirl round; then the bottom couple march outwards, and reverse top and bottom, and off they go again, the dear old ditty being kept up with grand spirit.

Ah! *this* is the sort of thing to finish such a festive scene; and it was with real regret that, at last the music ceasing, the dancers also stopped. And then the 'stirrup-cup,' and such a hand-shaking and happy Christmas-

ing! And such a burst of thanks to all to whom it was due, from all, that, I am sure, the reader fairly longs to have been amongst them!

At last all departing have departed, and those guests staying in the house have retired to rest, and there is a universal hush where so lately all was life and mirth. Thompson is left to watch Reynolds, as Mr. Jones has joined the musicians in their conveyance to Ulverston, as he says he has to send a telegram to a friend. And he does so, and this is it, to Scotland Yard: 'Send officer with warrant to arrest "Zephyr"—he is here. I cannot leave.'

Now, he strongly suspects this violin-player, 'Zephyr,' who is a German, of being mixed up with the 'stolen fiddle' business, as he more than once saw him and Reynolds most anxious to speak apart, but he was too much for them, and he got so friendly with both, and laughed so, that they could not throw him off, do what they would, and what plot

they had between them was not matured. To use a vulgarism, 'Zephyr' was 'wanted' for another affair, and Mr. Jones had him in his eye until the other officer arrived. And I may as well at once state that he was arrested in due course and taken up to London, where he was tried for a small offence, and sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

CHAPTER XI

The Hare Hunt

CHRISTMAS soon passes, and on an early day, when there is a 'southerly wind and a cloudy sky,' the hounds meet at Newby Bridge, and throw off exactly at ten o'clock, when, scent being keen, they are soon in full cry, taking the direction of Canny Hill. Every one is out, from Lord Walton to the stable-lad of the Swan Hotel, and every one is on foot—ladies in abundance; and 'T'owd Fossil' is there, and Mr. Blane, and Jack, Sir John Sinclair, and Mr. Bolton, and Lady Isabel, and—everybody, in fact.

On the slope of the fell overlooking the narrow end of the lake the hounds tear away, the hare well in advance. Now she makes for the rocks high up—they turn

her, and there is a grand run down and up some moorland to a pine forest southwards. This she reaches, and the wild music echoing here and there among the trees and rocks and gullies fires the blood of all pursuing, and there is a fine scampering over swamp and stone wall! See! as they come to a pause at the edge of the pines, watch the hare spring down below, closely attended by the dogs. She is a smart lady, and knows every inch of the ground. Ah! have they got her?—No! she doubles, and is off at a tearing pace back towards her starting-point; now she swerves to the right, and makes for Chapel House; she is there and up, high up the hill, and into another pine forest. They lose her there—no, a smart dog gives tongue again; down they come, all in full cry, and round by Stavely church, and through the village and on towards the mansion of Lord Walton, where she is lost.

And oh! to have seen the wall-climbing and the tearing through brake and briar and

over beck and through pool! I do believe Jack took 'T'owd Fossil' over the roughest ground he could find; but it was all as one to the sturdy Yorkshireman; what he could not climb he *tumbled* over, and what beck he could not jump he waded through; and if they laughed at him (which they never ceased doing), all he said was, 'Get on—never mind me; I never had such a grand run,' etc., etc.

At one time he got on the top of a rather higher wall than usual, so he sat down and gave his face a good mopping; and every now and then he waved his hat and his handkerchief, and shouted to the dogs, 'Go it, lads; rosin up,' until Lord Walton and his party and the rest gave a shout of laughter, and Jack called out, 'Come down, you lazy Yorkshireman'; but there he sat, and he merely winked, at the same time that he held up his flask, kissed his hand to the ladies, and took a good pull.

So, what with the fine exercise, the excitement of the chase, and the laughter, when

they arrived at headquarters they were in fine case for anything. And at dinner they were very merry, Jack especially so ; and he had his hands full one way or another, for he was made much of by the ladies ; and he had his yarns, rather ! one of which we must give :—

‘Auld Rasper, as an old basket-maker of Keswick was called, was a sad fellow for getting too much beer, etc., whenever he could, and a terrible chap for swearing. One day he and several others with whom he used to work were going over a wild part of the country, and they had to cross, by stepping-stones, a river which, owing to much rain, was greatly swollen, so much so that the stepping-stones were submerged. But cross they must, or deviate some three miles ; so they made the best of it, and most of them got over somehow.

‘But “auld Rasper” stood and swore for about five minutes, saying “he’d see they baskets at auld Harry afore he’d gang ower t’ beck wi’ ’em that gait.” So there

was nothing for it but one must take him on his back, which was arranged. This man who had to do duty for a horse was a sly one, and loved a practical joke, so when they were about half-way across the stream he began to feign slipping, etc., and "Rasper" got frightened. "Haud on, auld lad," he kept saying; and "Rasper" replied, "I's doing me best, Billy, but thy back's sadly slape—theere! that were a near go." Then Billy said, "I's ganging, dash me buttons if I isn't," and he gave a lurch, and over they both went, baskets and all.

'It was not a case of fear of drowning, and those who had landed did nothing but laugh, for they saw the joke; but "Auld Rasper" thought he saw something more than a joke, at least he felt it; and he said, when both had landed and shaken themselves, "Gockson! but I thowt thoo'd some divil in thee, with thee slip, slip! Thoo's wet me, an' thoo's wetted theesel', thoo rag and beane son ov a kirk steeple; but I's be hanged if I wayant

dry thee an' thee rags and beanes afore t' week's out, an' I's ha' nowt but dry sticks till t' job."

'On another occasion this old man was at Workington with several others, and he got sadly too much beer, as usual, until he was quite unable to walk home. They left him asleep beside one of the coal-pits; seeing which, some of the miners going down the shaft thought they would give him a bit of a "flay," as they put it. So they conveyed him gently to the pit mouth and descended with him.

'They made those at the bottom acquainted with the joke, and when signs of his awakening were noticed, they got up a good flaring light, and round about him gathered some thirty miners, a very big, ugly fellow deputed spokesman. "Well, and what do *you* want here?" "I's be main glad o' a quart o' swipes, Maister Deevil." "Who and what are you?" "W'en I were alive an' i' health, an' on earth, I war a basket chap fro' Kes'ick,

but I's now, Maister Deevil, what you please."

Mr. Mutchinson was asked by Lord Walton if he could not 'cap that'; so the hearty old gentleman gave them this:—

'Many, many years ago, the old coach-road from Manchester to the north was by Hanging Ditch, Red Bank, Cheetham, Cheetham Hill, Rooden Lane, and Besses o' th' Barn. Regularly every Friday, a hale old chap used to leave Manchester by this road, wheeling a barrow, in which was a sort of tub or barrel, filled with something savoury—at least, it would appear dogs thought so, for it was a noticeable fact that, as he left the town and met a dog, sniff, sniff it went, and followed him and the barrow.

'When he had got a bit on Hanging Ditch, he meets another, then another, and they both sniff, sniff, and *they* follow. "I say, owd lad, what han yo i' that tub—han yo gotten cats? Bith mon, bo its a gradely stiff sort o' snifter." "Thee goo an' get thee

parritch," replies the barrow man. "Ay, I's goo, bo' yo met cut us a slice o' that snifter—them dogs 'ull get fat on it, choose how."

'By this time there was another dog or two added to the train, and by the time the old man had reached the foot of Red Bank, he had at least fifteen after him. "Where ivver han they dogs coo fro?" asks an old woman, standing at her door. "Han yo gettin some o' they dogs' pups i' that tub, owd lad? Yo favver owd scrat wen 'as hidryfobbing?" "Howd thy din, Betty," gives out another; "dun yo no' see as how these be t' dog days, an' they 're havin' a bit of a houting?" To all of which the old chap answers never a word, but keeps adding another dog or two to the string, and on he goes.

'But ever since he left Manchester, when he saw a likely dog, he throws out a savoury bit from his tub; and he does so occasionally all the way, to keep them in tow, and when no one is looking. By this, they are at respectable Cheetham Hill, and one or two choice

animals sniff, sniff, and they also swell the cavalcade ; and such remarks as, “ Still at the old game, William ? ” and, “ Upon my word, dogs must like that old man, for, up or down, he’s never without them,” until Rooden Lane is reached, where there are several choice characters and some wags.

“ Hi, yo chaps, there’s owd Billy yond wi’ t’ dogs—shut doors, all on yer, or we’s noan hev a dog left in the Loane.” “ Billy, are yo berrying a dog, or summat, as yer gettin so mony whelps after yer ? ” “ What dun yo ask fur t’ lot, owd brid ? ” and so on. But he was equal to all occasions, and he at last landed at his home at Besses o’ th’ Barn, forty-nine dogs after him, as I’m a sinner ! He was no dog-stealer, but so wrapped up in them that he could never let one pass without enticing it to follow him. And come one or come fifty, he fed them well, housed them well, and readily gave them up if claimed.’

‘ What a character ! ’ laughed Lady Isabel. ‘ But did he sell them if not claimed—he

could not keep on week after week storing dogs!’

‘Why, your ladyship, he did a fair stroke of business that way, but he loved dogs, and treated them well for their own sakes.’

After this, Lady Isabel glanced at several of the ladies, and rose to retire to the drawing-room, Mr. Bolton very anxiously attending to the opening of the door, and gazing with a marked expression at Lady Isabel in doing so; and, as he bowed them out, Jack muttered to himself, ‘The cad!’ It is all very well, Mr. John Sinclair, to say that, but that ‘cad’ intends business, and you don’t seem to know what the meaning of that is; but, if you don’t want to see as fair a prize as ever fell to man’s lot slip by you, pull yourself together, and show yourself the man you really are.

As the gentlemen settle to their wine and their chat, Mr. Bolton asks Jack if there is any news of the violin?

‘No,’ replied the other; ‘and I fear, as

does my friend Blane here, that the vampires have got hold of it. But I have lots of people on the lookout.'

'By the way,' pursues Mr. Bolton, 'I bought a magnificent Strad. when last in London—the great period, and in a wonderful state of preservation—a gem, I assure you. It will have to be the very centre of my "inner circle."'

'May I ask what you mean by "inner circle" of fiddles?' queried Mr. Blane.

'Why, you see, we collectors lay down three—the inner, or "Strad." and "Joseph" examples; then the second, or such as "Bergonzi," "Serafino," "Nicholas Amati"; and then the other "Amati" makers, etc. etc., for the outer one.'

'And,' follows Mr. Blane, 'out of the pale of these do you admit nothing?'

'Well, a few odd ones here and there—say a Guadagnini, or a Lupot, or a very choice Stainer or Storioni.'

'And not any of those really fine old

Germans, Mr. Bolton, and not an Englishman? Oh, fie!’

‘Well, I do keep one or two of the modern school, English and French—but I merely have them as foils.’

‘Thank you—you would see Art of to-day frozen at the North Pole, I have no doubt. But I am bound to tell you that there is a spirit astir that will *not* be put down; and there are those now working, it may be humbly, but who have the latent might of giants in their thews; and let those who would subjugate them look to it. What little such as I have done has been done *for* Art; and here one finds (as it is universally, I am sorry to say, so found), one’s energies built up to serve as foils to *enhance* (?) the value of the old masters.’

‘Bravo, Blane!’ from Jack.

‘Please do not, Mr. Bolton, run away with the idea that what I say is in any way personal either of you or myself; but *why* is this determined opposition to the efforts of

the present generation? And why should it not be possible to do that which has been done before?’

‘You have not either the wood or the varnish.’

‘Pardon me, we have both; and more than that, we have appliances that were not to be had in the old days, and we ought to do more.’

‘Yes, but what do you meet with? Nothing but commonplace every-day sort of productions, which, placed beside the grand works of the Cremonese, dwarf into mere toys.’

‘Well, my dear sir, this is your view; but, mark my words, we are on the eve of a genuine revolution. At what prices were modern paintings valued sixty years or so ago, and by whom were they bought? And what do they fetch to-day, and in whose collections do they go? You cannot chain Art; and sooner or later a due recognition of the modern fiddle is as certain as that I am now at this most hospitable board.’

‘I quite agree with you, Mr. Blane,’ put in Lord Walton; ‘and I am certain that *your* work will come well to the front when that wished for day arrives.’

‘He’s right enough about the pictures,’ said a guest at the other end of the table. ‘I know nothing of fiddles, but I don’t see why the modern school should not hold its own.’

This and sundry other opinions being expressed, there was a move for the drawing-room. Whether it was that he was tired after hunting, or that the presence of Mr. Bolton did not suit him, we know not; but Jack Sinclair did not seem himself, and it would appear as though he and Lady Isabel had had a ‘tiff,’ by the way they mutually avoided each other. And when a string quartette was arranged, Jack kept out of it somehow, and Mr. Bolton seemed in high feather, and played the viola really well, especially in that love passage, as we call it, in one movement, where the viola and first

violin discourse most exquisitely. The work is by Mozart.

But Sinclair seemed ill at ease, and gave himself a great shake as he muttered, 'Ass that I am! cannot I see another fellow enjoy himself without sulking? I'll just show them how to handle a fiddle in a bit'; and, sure enough, when the Mozart was over, he rendered Mendelssohn's magnificent concerto for violin and pianoforte, accompanied by Lady Isabel, in such a manner that Mutchinson, with tears in his eyes and a husky voice, wrung him by the hand as he said, 'My lad, but you can play!' And this seemed none the less pleasant to Jack, accompanied as it was by a very low but almost tearful 'thank you' from Isabel.

This was to be the last evening of the general festivities, as to-morrow nearly all the visitors would depart; but Mr. Blane and 'T'owd Fossil' had promised to stay a few days longer, as the frost had set in, and it was proposed that a walking tour should be

undertaken by Lord Walton, Jack, and these two.

Among the letters received by Sinclair on the following morning was one from Tyson of the hotel, Wasdalehead, in which he said, 'Can you come over at once, as I think I have got wind of your lost fiddle?' Jack rushed off to communicate this news, and when the last guest (Sir John Sinclair) had departed in his carriage, there was a 'council of war' as to the best way to proceed; for Lord Walton at once said that to go round that way was the very thing.

'Suppose, Jack, he said, 'we take the train round by Ulverstone and Furness Abbey up to Ravenglass, where we can give these friends a trip on that mountain railway to Boot, in Eskdale. We can have lunch there, and show them Stanley Ghyll and Birker Force, afterwards go the five miles over the moors, and drop down to Wasdalehead?'

'Admirable,' said Jack; 'and I only hope Tyson *has* got wind of it. I wrote to him and

several more innkeepers, as so many fiddlers are about among the mountains at this season, and one doesn't know into what hands the thing may have got.'

'But how after—how shall we leave Wasdalehead? Do you city gentlemen think you can tramp over the roughest ground in these parts, and in winter, mind?'

Both the others thought they were 'game,' as they put it; and so it was arranged that on the following morning they should make a start and hunt the 'stolen fiddle.'

CHAPTER XII

Furness Abbey to Stanley Ghyll

ON leaving Lake Side they made a short pause at Furness Abbey, as neither of the guests had seen the grand ruins. When Mrs. Ann Radcliffe visited this monastic pile the railway had not disturbed the sublime repose of the glen, and in consequence we have her truly beautiful, if mythological, picture ; now, we have to take for granted what it was in her day, and enjoy what is left to us, and be thankful. But looked at from what point of view you will, or be the shrieking engine passing or not, you will have to travel far and not find anything with which to compare it. Melrose may be more majestic, or Fountains more weird, and there may be a something here and there about Kirkstall or Shap, or the

still lesser ones of note, that impresses one where Furness does not ; but, for all that, take this exquisite glen and its noble timber ; the natural repose, the charm pervading all ; and view the ruins from all points, and you will not fail to be greatly impressed.

Here is a broken column, and beside that, three-parts of an arch, whose spandrels and sculptured reliefs are wonderful, even to-day. There is what is left of the chapel, the long rows of the bases only of the former majestic pillars, the grass-grown altar space, the huge tower wonderfully intact ; a whole side wall pannelled, as it were, with fluted and fantastically sculptured reliefs ; a fern clinging here and there, and the audacious ivy everywhere.

Where the ashes of the monks repose ; where the magnificent shell of what once contained that wondrous east window, towers high over all ; where the refectory stretches far, and where the humbler offices can be traced, some by this feature, some by that, there is such an earnestness of purpose, and such a fervour of

the love for art, if I may so say, that no one can behold without reverence. And be sure that our friends of the rosin were not behind in their admiration and respectful homage; it is your musical artist who *can* so thoroughly appreciate the noble efforts of the sister arts; and one had a word of praise for this, another for that, and Mr. Mutchinson very quaintly said, 'Those old chaps knew how to build a house—ay, and how to choose a warm nook.'

But we have little time to spend in the 'valley of the deadly nightshade,' as the glen is called. We must deposit our people at Ravenglass, where they cross the main line after leaving the train from the south, and take a comical look at the pigmy of a train that is to convey them to Boot, in Eskdale.

I had better at once explain that the line is very narrow gauge, carriages and engine small, and that the several stations (?) on the line (single, of course) are merely boxes, which are locked up until the train arrives. The guard of the only train is stationmaster, ticket clerk,

porter, and guard. He could not well be driver, or I fancy he would have to be that; and as they stop at a station he jumps off, takes tickets, and opens his box of a station, gives out any that may be wanted, locks up again, off on to the next, and so on to Boot.

‘Well,’ said ‘Fossil,’ ‘this *is* a start! Why, these are only bandboxes! Look here, Sinclair, they’ve put on beer barrels, and there’s a lot of ducks in a coop, and I’m blest if they have not brought up the rear with a good stiff load of manure.’

‘Oh,’ replied Jack, ‘this is nothing. See the loads that I have seen sometimes. By the way, Tom’ (to the ‘general of all work’), ‘have you had any of your *very* extra assortments lately?’

‘Well, yes, Mr. John, we’ve landed one or two, but we’s fairish to-day. And we’ve a pig to pick up, and mebbey summut tasty up t’ fells. Now, tak yer seats, ye chaps; we’s ten minutes late as ’tis.’ And the little engine puffs away and struggles bravely up and down

(literally), for it always seemed to me that little or no levelling was done here, and if a curve *could* be managed, a curve was made.

‘Why, we shall be upset,’ cried ‘Fossil,’ as an extra acute curve brought up the train as though a stiff nor’-wester had heeled it over. ‘Here, you chap, give me a double insurance ticket,’ he cried out to the guard; this beats Yorkshire hollow! There! a bump enough to shake one’s marrow upside down! and I’m morally certain we are going slap against that rock. No, we’ve grazed it, but we’ve passed. Talk about those cañons of California; they’re fools to those passes. Look yonder, my lord; there’s an old woman running for her life across yon field flinging her arms about. Why, the train is stopping for her!’

And so it was and did, and the old body ran up to the guard and, nearly out of breath, gasped out, ‘Maister, mebbly you can gie me change for *horf-a-crown*! I’s gitten t’ lad’s scoo wage to pay.’

‘Ye auld rag! we’s hev ye up an’ ye stop

the train for such like fash,' said the laughing guard, as he motioned to the driver to go on. But for all this they are very accommodating on this funny little railway, frequently stopping to let down and take up passengers between stations, and there is sometimes a basket on a wall whipped off in passing empty, and replaced full on returning.

Presently 'Cape Horn,' as it is named, is rounded—a most extraordinary succession of curves round sharp out-jutting rocks, etc.—and the southern end of Eskdale opening out in a wild beauty all its own, the distant sweeps of the high mountains delight the eye of the travellers as they gradually wind their way in the jog-trot conveyance. The ground is just sugared over, as it were, with a slight fall of snow, and the air has a crisp feel, very suggestive of a somewhat prolonged frost. Here and there a magnificent tree stands out gaunt and bare.

At the foot of the fells, coppice-woods abound, and many plantations of larch sweep

grandly even from base to summit. A startled hare bounds away as the snorting engine plods along, and the solitary crane rises slowly from his marshy feeding-ground. Truly there is a quiet and a charming beauty in this spot, summer giving it another and a startling aspect, and the one who passes seven-eighths of his life in the close city would do well to avail himself occasionally of the facilities opened out for visiting such places.

At last the terminus at Eskdale is reached, and the moment Mr. Mutchinson alighted on the platform he went and quizzed the small engine, saying, 'Well, you're a rum little chap, and some of our Yorkshiremen would laugh rarely if they saw such a pigmy. Will you' (to the driver and guard) 'wish us all luck with that?' and he handed a piece of silver, which was accepted with thanks. They went afterwards to the small but comfortable and well-conducted inn at Boot, and very soon were busy with the Lake country's stock

for all meals, ham and eggs, and truly good they are, we can testify.

After this luncheon they hurried to Stanley Ghyll, for the day was drawing on, and there would be none too much time before night for them to reach Wasdale. This Stanley Ghyll is seen from two points, from high and from low ground; but there was no time to see it from both, so Lord Walton decided to take them by the lower or river way.

Up a lovely old lane, and by a farmhouse, then through a field to a coppice-wood, and the descent is to the wild beck rushing madly through the rough defile below. This is crossed by a rustic bridge (of which there are many, and also rails and chains to ensure safety to the traveller), and from this point bursts upon you the awful grandeur of this unrivalled Ghyll.

Whether at one time the river, some seven hundred feet above you, fell over the rock, a clean, sheer fall, and ultimately cleft the said rock in twain, we can only surmise;

but to-day it strikes one that it was so, as there is a perpendicular rock rising boldly from the tumbling stream on either hand, and down the gloomy extremity of the defile pours from the high ledge above the whole body of water as it leaves the stony bed of the river above.

Seen from the place where our friends stood in mute admiration (even 'T'owd Fossil' is dumb), the fall appears like a band of white silk over black velvet, and the waving fronds of ferns, winter as it is, and the solitary mountain ash here and there swaying over the seething waters, give a weird sort of charm to the whole. And as you cross the stream, first by one bridge, and then by another, and cling to a chain to enable you to creep up the side of a rock and gaze up at the water above you, and look at the giddy depth below, the thought of the 'Majesty of Nature' forces itself upon you, and the smallness of human efforts to that opposed. There is many a deep pool to fall into which would

be certain death, and the slippery state of the rocks over which you must pass renders locomotion exceedingly difficult.

But all is seen at last, and the return made to the inn, where the friends take a toothful, as Jack puts it, when they turn to ascend the fell leading to Wasdale, Birker Force being out of the question for to-day.

After a stiff and rather tame walk, they are on the farther edge of the wild moor; on their left Burnmoor tarn, on their right the foot of Scafell, and before them the magnificent grandeur of the whole range of the Wasdale Mountains, from Yewbarrow to Great Gable, and deep, deep below them the sombre Wast Water. Mr. Blane and Mr. Mutchinson were both greatly impressed—and no wonder, for we very much question whether there is *quite* the equal of this singular scene in England—some have gone so far as to say, in Europe.

Be this as it may, as the gradual descent to the vale opened out the wild and romantic

beauty growing on every hand, ‘T’ owd Fossil’ said, ‘Well, this is a treat! I shall thank you gentlemen to my dying day for bringing me here; and I could be almost glad that our friend Mr. Sinclair had lost his fiddle, this being the result.’

‘Yes; and perhaps one in every thousand who visit this country knows of this view, and perhaps one in every ten thousand comes to see it!’ This from Lord Walton.

‘And, Jack put in, ‘people say we have no scenery in England,—and they must fly off to the Highlands, or the Continent, or, perhaps, to Norway. Now we have this, and we have Ennerdale, and Buttermere, and Crummock, and Honister Pass; and we have Borrowdale and Keswick, Ullswater, St. John’s Vale, and Thirlmere, to say nothing of Windermere, Rydal, Grasmere, and a host of wonderfully wild scenes high up the fells, where nestle the solemn tarns. The fact is, people coming here are far too fond of doing their walking *behind horses*, and some—nay,

most, of the grandest bits in the world are never seen, and the sublime solitude—as this—remains unbroken. I've heard people actually assert they had seen the Lake country when they had just been to Bowness for one day! Bah!'

By this time the footbridge over the burn running into Wastwater is reached, and the travellers trudge in the deepening gloom to the old inn at Wasdale Head, now tenanted by a worthy man named Tyson; but it was long held by that remarkable man, Willy Ritson, of whom more anon.

CHAPTER XIII

Disappointment

THEY say coming events cast their shadows before ; and it was very evident here that the expected guest, or guests, had brought Tyson and his obliging daughter to the fore ; and there was a general smartness and warm-heartedness, so to put it, about the place, that was most grateful to the travellers. The inn itself is rather above the average for such a place, and the welcome and the good things to be got are decidedly so.

As the well-known voice of Sinclair was heard in the rambling place, Tyson hurried forward, his daughter just behind, and in the rear of her several most respectable helps, all eager to see the genial fellow and his friends.

‘ Well, old man, and how about the fiddle ? ’

asked Sinclair, as he warmly shook the inn-keeper by the hand. 'Oh, but here is Lord Walton and two of my friends' (whispering that one is Blane). 'I think you know his lordship?'

'I am greatly honoured,' replied the well-spoken Tyson, 'and I am sure we shall do all we can for you.'

'Of that we are sure,—but about that fiddle?'

'Well, Mr. John, it's gone, and so has the man who had it.'

'Gone?—could you not stop him?'

'Well, I'll tell you all about it—but do go to your rooms first, and we will at once prepare supper—shall it be supper, or what would you like?'

'By all means, supper—shall we not, Bob?'

'Nothing better just now,' acquiesced his lordship; and in a short while all were seated at a most substantial meal in the really excellent dining-room of the house, and Tyson with them, Lord Walton insisting that so it

should be. And they were waited on by several comely lasses, the daughter acting as chief; and very merry indeed they soon became, in spite of the acute disappointment anent the 'stolen fiddle.'

'Well, you must know,' began Tyson, 'that about this time there is generally one or two fiddlers travelling about here, merrymakings, etc., going on all over, and they are much in request. There was one, an oldish man, and a rare hand at the bow, came here just when I wrote to you, Mr. John. He had a fine fiddle, and I looked inside it once, and saw it was made by this gentleman, Mr. Blane. As you had written about the robbery, I at once named it to him; and I was not at all satisfied with his manner—he seemed uneasy and suspicious,—so I at once wrote to you to come. But he's gone, and we could not keep him, though I told him we were going to have a bit of a kick-up, and I'd pay him well.'

'Which way has he gone?' asked Jack.

'By Mosedale, over Black Scale and Scarf

Gap, to Buttermere—he went two days ago.’

‘Well, we’ll follow him. Do you know his name?’

‘No; but I’ll give you an exact description of him, and if you catch him up you will soon know him.’

‘Did you examine the fiddle?’ asked Mr. Blane.

‘Why, sir, I had a goodish look at it, and I thought it was a rare one. It was reddish, and had a tone like an organ pipe.’

All the three gentlemen looked at each other, as though the description tallied with the one lost; but, as Mr. Blane said, he had made many to which the same remarks would apply. For all that, however, they were hopeful, and presently adjourned to the ‘house part,’ or common hall, or general room, where there was a quaint old fire-place, and several very old oak chests and chairs, and queer nooks and corners; and there were several dalesmen in the place, happy with pipe and glass, and

one or two fine sheep-dogs on the hearth, 'sleeping,' as one of the shepherds said, 'wi' yan ee oppen.'

The strangers quietly mixed with the others, and very soon anecdote and quaint remark brought out a merry laugh from some one or a loud peal from all. It was just such a homely picture as would have delighted the masters of the Wilkie school; and there was goodwill evidently throughout.

'And is old Willy Ritson alive yet?' asked Jack Sinclair, speaking to Tyson.

'He's just about alive, sir, and that's all. He lives now at Nether Wasdale, and many of the old visitors here go to see him. There's few to touch auld Billy now.'

'Thoo's reet theere, Tyson,' put in an old man; 'we's nivver hev sic another chap for leeing, thoo mak thy moind up till that.'

'Ay, ay,' from another; 'Teddy's reet; he war a sneezer wi' thet moo o' hissen. Blest if he kenned when he war no leeing, it's my beleef.'

‘Did you ever hear that yarn of his,’ asked Jack Sinclair, ‘when he took Colenso and a lot of other lights of the Church to the top of Scafell—up by Burnthwaite and Lingmell? Some of you have, but not all, so I will tell it.

‘Colenso was not then the great man he has since become; and he had a keen wit, and was always drawing Ritson out when he’d the chance (so Will told me himself). So Ritson thought he would “put him one in” some day, and sure enough he did. Well, as all you dalesmen know, Lingmell is simply like a house-side from Burnthwaite up to the level before you make the last climb to Scafell top; and to begin with, Ritson kept looking anxiously at Colenso, who along with the others, was straining hard to keep up with Billy, and all were panting and blowing, hot as fire.

‘Suddenly Ritson stopped, and said very seriously to Colenso, “I’s hev to gang back. I canna gang up till t’ top.”

‘“Why, what’s the matter, man?” asked Colenso.

“Nowt—but I feels badly.”

“Come, Ritson, this won’t do ; you’re as right as ninepence. Hang the man ! what is he after ?” And no wonder he asked, for Ritson was on his knees near Colenso, rolling about and mumbling and groaning, until all the reverend gentlemen gathered about him in alarm. Presently he clutched Colenso by the knees and brought him to earth, and they together rolled down the mountain some fifty yards, where they were stopped by a projecting hillock. Ritson here let go, and lay as though stunned.

‘But he had only been shamming all through, wishing that he could have it to say he had played this practical joke on the future bishop. He presently gasped out “Brandy,” and several flasks were soon at the lips of the sly rascal ; so he not only had his joke, but had some good pulls at their expense. He said how sorry he was, how he hoped Colenso was no worse, etc. And before long they were at the top of England—Scafell. Here Ritson was very

quiet, and Colenso would not let him alone, but asked him what he was so glum about. Ritson struck hard this time, saying, "I's nobbut thinking some o' ye parsons are aboot as near heaven as ye'll ivver be—that's aw."

Next morning they were astir early, and, after a hearty breakfast and warm handshake, were soon on their way through Mosedale to Buttermere. This Mosedale is a wild, basin-like valley, rising at every step to the pass called Black Scale, leading the traveller to Ennerdale. When well up the rugged path, if you turn and look back the way you have come, you will see a most remarkable and truly magnificent mass of mountains, the Vale of Wasdale in middle distance; Lingmell, like a huge green wall, full to the eye before you, and over this that awful chasm called Mickledoor, black as night below, and in its inner depths, fringed higher up with light touches of snow. And beyond that, Scafell proper looms grandly, and to the left of the chasm Scafell Pike.

There is just a glance or two of sunshine—winter sunshine, and one or two streaks shoot between the huge rocks far as the eye can reach, like bars of pale gold. The air is wonderfully bright, and the sky of a blue not often seen in England, and truly such a scene is worth a visit, though it be winter in which our friends see it.

Black Scale is topped at last, and the solemn Ennerdale bursts on the enraptured gaze, the noble Pillar mountain well posted, like a huge sentinel, far to the left; and the lake, taking up middle and far distance, very, very sombre, and almost awful in its extreme loneliness. For there is not a sign of man anywhere. No farm to be seen, no sheep, no shepherd; the lonely mountain rill meandering from the crevices to the right until it joins the main body of water far down the vale, though there are times when this said rill is a mad torrent, carrying all before it, and woe be to the tourist if he seeks to cross it in its fury!

But now the stepping-stones are well above

water, and enable our friends to cross, and from this point they make the gradual ascent of Scarf Gap, from the top of which the exquisitely beautiful vales of Buttermere and Crummock, with their lakes, appear. Unlike Ennerdale, all here is of life, and homesteads dot the plains and uplands, and the blue smoke rises in many a nook, speaking of man and his necessities. It would be difficult to convey to the reader the charm of this view of vale, wood, and water. Even as you stand there and view it all, you are conscious that you cannot take it all in, and to find expression in words you simply are unable; how then attempt to paint it here?

Our four friends spoke of it in raptures, and passed on down to the vale, and by secluded spots and winding road until the inn at Buttermere is reached. When about fifty yards from the entrance (near which is the small church) Jack Sinclair stopped, saying, 'There goes a fiddle; I wonder if it is our man?' They walked quietly, and entered the room where

some one was playing, and there, sure enough, was the travelling musician described by Tyson at Wasdale Head, and Mr. Blane in a moment saw it was one of his instruments, but *not* the one of which they were in quest. This was disappointing enough, but they had to make the best of it, and they did.

The man playing the fiddle looked right enough—no thief, to look at him; but he seemed desperately anxious about his instrument, and jealous of any one touching it. But when Jack told him the maker of it stood before him, he put it on the table, and, with a warm glow of real pleasure, he went up to Mr. Blane and held out his hand, saying, ‘May I shack thee by th’ hand; it’s like nuts to know a mon as can mak stuff like yon fiddle.’ Mr. Blane warmly acquiesced, and he told the others afterwards that such spontaneous sympathy was more to him than could be imagined, and he was proud to say he had had many instances of it.

After a substantial meal they took a boat

and crossed Crummock Water to see Scale Force. This lies west of the lake, and you cross a perfect wilderness of tumbled rocks and huge boulders before you reach it. You have no idea of such a fall until you enter a so-called ghyll about twelve feet wide, and awful perpendicular rocks cleaving the mountain in twain, some twenty yards from the entrance, disclose in the gloom a sheer fall of water about two feet wide from a height of about one hundred and fifty feet. It fell with a thundering roar, clean cut as with a knife, and it rumbled and tumbled out of the chasm down its stony bed to the water below, where its individuality was soon lost, as is the over boastful and not too clever youth of the country when the town absorbs him and he finds his level.

The old boatman who rowed them across, and put them on their way leading to the Newlands Pass to Keswick, told them that this Crummock was a most dangerous sheet of water, as the sudden squalls rushing down

Red Pike and the other fells sometimes fairly lifted the water like a cup, and no boat could live in such terrible wind ; and he also told them (a fact) that the largest trout ever caught there was secured by a lady near twelve o'clock at night with the fly, and its weight was twelve and three-quarter pounds. This astonished our friends, as well it might, but the writer can vouch for this being true ; and he once saw a dish there of seventy-three trout, all secured by a cousin of his, and all taken with one rod, each fish from three ounces to four pounds—a truly noble catch.

CHAPTER XIV

The Vale of Newlands

BUTTERMERE, with its lovely lake, with its stupendous crag of Honister, that, towering gigantic and awful, would seem to guard the vale ; Buttermere, with its recollections of the changeful fate of its lovely ‘Mary,’ is left behind, and our travellers wend their way through the peaceful and romantic vale of Newlands. Here rise above them the high mountains of Robinson, Hinds Garth, Causey Pike, etc.; in middle distance, Swineside, the magnificent lines of Skiddaw and Blencathra closing the view. The road is here by a brawling stream, there past a primitive homestead, anon skirting a noble forest of larch and sycamore, finally rising gradually to a stretch of moorland, where the ever-awake

sheep find it hard to snatch a morsel of herbage.

A dalesman gives them 'good-day,' or a shepherd lad shyly glances at them in passing, or a sturdy young urchin clings yet a little closer to his buxom mother at a cottage door hard by the open road, or a collie dog will rush out of a farmyard with a 'yap, yap,' ever on the alert to evade a stone or a threatening stick. Afterwards lonely, save at the sudden bend of the road a stray sheep is startled whilst nibbling a tempting mouthful found in a mossy nook, skurrying away, turning, when out of reach, on a grey crag to gaze stupidly at the intruders, munch, munch the while.

A hare scutters across the road; the whirl of a pheasant causes a motion in the otherwise still air; and a mighty flock of starlings rise, the birds instantaneously flinging themselves into such remarkably accurate forms of square, triangle, etc., as is their wont. Sounds suggestive of still greater solitude now

and again come from a far-off shepherd on the Fell, or the subdued roar of a waterfall, the intermittent bark of the fox, or the plaintive cry of the curlew.

As the travellers approach nearer to the neighbourhood of Derwentwater a change of temperature is noticed, somewhat damper, and, as a consequence, hoarfrost has taken the place of a dry, black one. Every blade of grass is white; every atom exposed of thousands of trees makes a perfect bewilderment of beauty—scintillating, softly overlapping, feathery, and evanescent as a dream.

The trees of the forest—the oak, elm, sycamore, maple, and pine—each fibre of each one stands out sharp, and gives to the beholder a startling realisation of their wondrous anatomy. A few stray bits of grass, and odds and ends of sticks and straw lie huddled anyway; but the hoar spangles have breathed their beauty on them, and something exquisite is evolved out of that which is otherwise simply refuse.

And now Derwent Water is seen on the right—that lake so lovely when the foliage of spring or autumn is supreme. At the present time it is merely suggestive of beauty, and a moment or two only is bestowed in contemplation of its level bosom, or the noble crags or hills around. But the more rugged mountains of Borrowdale, with the mighty Scafell in the far distance, are greeted longingly by Sinclair, and many is the tale he relates of that wild den of solitude, as they presently take some needed refreshment in the comfortable and well-appointed hotel at Portinscale.

Before entering Keswick they inspected Crosthwaite old church, built, if I mistake not, by that most indefatigable divine, St. Kentigern, not the least interesting parts of which are the very fine chancel and altar; but the tomb of the Derwentwater family, with its most quaint low reliefs in brass, is, to most, the great attraction, while the noble monumental tomb of Southey is so to others.

This is in white marble, and is in the church; but the poet lies in the western portion of the graveyard, and within half a mile of the house in which he lived so happily.

The writer is proud to be allowed to enumerate the vicar, H. D. Rawnsley, in the long list of his friends, such a sterling one to art as he has proved himself.

On the following day, after many inquiries had been made *re* the stolen fiddle—to no purpose,—our friends visited Lodore cascade, and viewed the lake from Castle Head and from Walla Crag. Then, in the latter part of the afternoon, they visited that relic of antiquity, the Druids' Circle. It has frequently occurred to the writer how admirably the place where this temple is erected has been chosen. There is little, if any, doubt that nearly all the country round about these stones was covered with forests of oak at the time they were placed where they are; and as the fires consuming the, alas! often human, sacrifices should be seen all around,

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it was necessary to choose an elevated spot, not actually a mountain, and this has been done here, and the view of hill and lake, vale, river, and wood, is simply charming.

Not that these would be looked for by the stern ancients ; their idea was a central place for their savage rites ; and one may fancy stream after stream of devout worshippers wending their way over moor, fell, and mountain to join in the, to them, holy practices ; and in the solemn night, in the wild glare of the fires of their beloved oak, the blood of the hapless victim would be spilled, the priests standing in the sacred enclosure, the dense masses outside the circle, on whose faces the lurid flames are reflected.

Probably some such reflections as these occurred to our friends as they stood around, but none gave utterance to them. The most pertinent remark was made by Fossil, as he turned to the west and said, ‘Man, what a sunset!’ And well he might say so, for, away over the Keswick Vale, beyond the

snow-covered fells of Newlands, Buttermere, and Crummock, a jagged, rough semblance of a huge neck of black cloud appeared, stretching from south to north-west, and under this cloud was an arch of intense crimson, and, fan-like, shot up behind this cloud, up to the very zenith, the most dazzling streaks of blood-red, crimson, purple, and orange, shooting from the fast-sinking sun ; and every wandering vapour caught these fires, flinging them back on the wan fells and piled-up peaks on every side, refraction on refraction, rose-purple here, blue-green there, and neutral tints everywhere.

And, behind all, and seemingly far, far away, as though in another atmosphere and hemisphere, thin streaks of scarce-defined feathery vapour, also fan-like, streamed from the horizon up to the zenith, in gentle curves ; but at the apex of each there is a sharply-defined bend, as of a bow, and of more pronounced colour ; and these, catching the glowing colours around, seem like bursting rockets

as they reached their highest point of altitude. Then there is a gradual fading and a shrinking of colour; crimsons become pale rose-pinks; blues, soft purples, delicate greens—anon greys seem to obliterate everything, as our friends wend their way through a shadowy pine grove, the twitter of a bird the only sound accompanying.

CHAPTER XV

An Adventure on the Hills

INDICATIONS of a change of weather induce our friends to hurry on to Windermere on the following morning. Lord Walton telegraphs home for his steam yacht to be at once despatched to meet them at Waterhead, Windermere, and a carriage and pair are in readiness at the door of the good old hostelry, the Royal Oak, early, so as to enable them to do the journey comfortably.

The ascent from Keswick is somewhat of a pull for the horses; consequently, until Brow Top is reached, it is usual for them to walk, and the people they draw likewise. On alighting, Sinclair plunged into one of his 'experiences'—

'I had once arranged to show Wasdale to

a friend of mine, who was somewhat lame, and we made for Langdale, leaving Ambleside early one morning. I knew the ground—he did not; and I persisted in making it very plain to him that the way we had to go, up Rosset Ghyll and over Sty Head Pass, etc., was not just walking over a bowling-green, and kept asking him—could he do it? Of course, of course; so on we plodded, and I took the precaution to refill my whisky-flask with brandy at the higher Dungeon Ghyll Hotel—and well it was I did so.

‘As you know’ (turning to Lord Walton), ‘up to Langdale Head, it is not much of a walk for a decent pedestrian; but I was somewhat taken aback by my friend stating at Dungeon Ghyll that he was a bit tired! Of course this was a floorer, as we had not actually begun our work, and had all the climbing to do. But, as he persisted in going on, on we went. Man, before we got to the top of Rosset Ghyll, two hours’ walk from the hotel, he was, I could see, pretty well done.

But, apart from his infirmity, he was a plucky fellow, and, reaching somewhat level ground on the top, we went on for a long spell decently.

‘ Well on in September, and now about six in the evening, we hurried on, so as not to be overtaken by darkness on descending Sty Head Pass, stony, rugged, and wild as you know it is at the best of times. But my friend seemed to give way suddenly, and we had to rest at the head of the pass an hour, the edge of dark becoming more distinct every yard. I had now to support him, and before long he stopped and gasped, “I can’t go on, Jack—I’m done.” And then I found what was the power of brandy ; had it not been for that, I firmly believe he would have died.

‘ As it was, I got him half-way down the pass, the darkness partly broken by the moon peeping over Scafell. But here he gave in entirely, and throwing himself into my arms, fairly sobbed, “I’m dying, Jack.” “Good God in heaven forbid,” I said, and tears were

in my voice, if not in my eyes; and yet he could not pass over the sublime picture before us, but must say, just before he swooned, "Is it not beautiful?"

'I certainly never saw such a sight; the wild rocks high on our right under Gable one mass of silver; on our left, the dark gloom of the valley, walled in by stupendous masses of black crags, tumbled from the shoulders of Scafell, over whose unconcerned peaks calmly sailed the wandering moon. You may be sure that I lost no time in idle contemplation of this scene, but at once took my friend in my arms, and literally had to carry him some two miles down that nasty pass to John Ritson's farm, where we soon had him well cared for, and on the following morning he was all right again; but it was a bit of experience for me.'¹

They now joined the carriage, and, by Shoulthwaite Moss, proceeded to Thirlmere,

¹ This incident really occurred to the writer, his elder brother being the lame friend.

along whose margin they rolled until the 'Nag's Head' at Wyburn was reached, where they changed conveyances and horses. Here Sinclair took exception to the slight chain brake, as, descending the Dunmail Raise into Grasmere, the safety, perhaps the lives, of all might depend upon the strength of this. But as he was assured it had 'happen been ower t' gap a hunner times,' he mounted with the rest, and off they went, two young and spirited animals replacing the others.

Now, descending Raise Gap at any time in a carriage requires care, and all should be in order. But all was *not* in order on this occasion, as was very soon found out; for, soon after the drag was put on, the spirited animals became restive, and the driver every moment seemed less able to control them. Sinclair saw this, and he looked grave, and begged Lord Walton to change places with him, he passing to the left seat facing the descent.

He had scarcely done so when snap went the

chain, and the conveyance went flying down the road at a fearful pace. Lord Walton saw Jack set his teeth hard, and prepare to spring out, so as to try and arrest the horses' mad progress ; and he tried all he could to dissuade him, holding at last by his arm ; but Sinclair, looking, for him, very stern, even angry, with, 'Let go, Bob, or you'll rue it,' placed his right foot on the step, and, watching his opportunity, flung himself out bodily, and, catching the left trace, contrived, by leaps and bounds, to keep up with the now flying horses.

Gradually, hand over hand, he got to the head of the near horse, and, as best he could, patted its neck with whichever hand was at liberty, striving to soothe both, shouting to the terrified driver to ease their mouths somewhat, and to the three in the carriage to keep their seats, and their hearts up. And the road being frosty made the whole affair worse ; for, added to the steepness, many nasty curves made the danger of a sudden

plunge over the edge of the road, down the Fell into the stream below, great.

How Sinclair kept his feet seems marvellous, but he did ; and presently he had the delight of feeling a slight decrease in the speed, more noticeable later on ; and as they reached the 'Swan,' close to Grasmere, all danger was over, and Jack was receiving wholesale congratulations, for which he seemed to care very little ; but he *did* seem to care for saying this to the driver, 'Tell that confounded landlord at "Nag's Head," Hodgkin, that I'll trounce those miserable bones of his when next I come over the Raise ; and he knows what Jack Sinclair says he means.'

Whilst the horses were groomed and baited after their terrible exertion, Lord Walton took our friends to Wordsworth's grave. 'And I want you also to read the epitaph of another great man,' he said, 'though one not heard of so much as he ought to be, judging by his works left behind. And I do so because it was really Wordsworth who wrote the inscrip-

tion, and two of you, at least, can say you have read a composition by him utterly unknown to the world.

Green was Wordsworth's close friend, as was Hartley Coleridge, who lies there, also De Quincey and John Wilson, otherwise Christopher North, who once boasted that he had carried Green on his back over a river, and that England had three painters, one of whom was William Green.' The words on the stone are as follows :¹—

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF
WILLIAM GREEN,

the last twenty-three years of whose life were passed in this neighbourhood, where, by his skill and industry as an Artist, he produced faithful representations of the country, and lasting memorials of its more perishable features. He was born at Manchester, and died at Ambleside on the 29th day of April 1823, in the sixty-third year of his age, deeply lamented by a numerous Family, and universally respected.

¹ William Green was the writer's grandfather on his mother's side.

CHAPTER XVI

The Burglars captured

THE day after that on which Lord Walton left home with his friends Mr. Jones seemed particularly suspicious, crusty, and not to be got at, so to speak. He was here, there, and everywhere—never seemed to be doing anything, but always seemed to be going to do something—was particularly ‘dry,’ and bothered cook’s life out for ‘just a drop, my dear,’ and he got muddled at last, or seemed so, and the other servants stared when the butler did not ‘call him over the coals’ for it. But he didn’t, but let him roam about, and get in everybody’s way—even the dogs looked shy at him, and Master Rat gave him a decidedly wide berth whenever he saw him coming, zig-zag fashion.

All the same, Mr. Jones seemed to have a sort of a method; and the very keen observer might draw an inference from his, on this occasion, keeping entirely out of the way of Reynolds; but the same observer might also have noticed that whenever that worthy was out of his (Mr. Jones's) sight, the detective slipped like a rat round some corner or other, and was sure to be rolling about not a mile from the suspected thief, but by no means near him. As the day drew on, Mr. Jones got from bad to worse, apparently, and the servants began to use strong language, even hinting that Mr. Thompson was not doing his duty by his lordship to allow such work.

When it was nearly dark, Reynolds asked permission of the butler to go over to Lake Side, which was granted, and he accordingly went. And then Mr. Jones rolled up to his bedroom, and presently came down by the seldom used back stair, as *sober as a judge*, and dressed as a countryman, wonderfully

disguised. He shot out over the lawn like a mad thing, and was soon lounging on the station platform, where he saw Reynolds, evidently waiting the arrival of a train from the south.

Before long this arrived, and Mr. Jones just waited to see Reynolds greet a man who came by it, when he darted off to the common room of the hotel near the station, at this time of day and season seldom troubled with visitors. But he felt sure that it would be here the two would come, and he prepared accordingly, by speaking very rapidly to the landlord, and lying down on a form near the fire, as though fast asleep and far from sober.

He lay there thinking he should have his hands full, for the man whom Reynolds had met was known to him as a desperate thief, and must have been telegraphed for to London by Reynolds ; and, come what might, he must now secure his man red-handed, and the other too, though this latter had a price

on his head, and was the sore point with all the force, as they had failed to take him. Mr. Jones hoped—nay, he felt sure, all the other servants were true; but he felt a bit anxious as he lay there, for much was at stake, and no one could tell whether strong allies would not aid the rascals.

Presently Reynolds and his man entered the room, and seemed greatly annoyed that there should be any one there. One of them shook Mr. Jones roughly, but all he got for answer was a grunt, and some muttering about ‘Yan moor pint,’ so they let him snore on, being quite sure he was too far gone to overhear anything they might say. Having each called for something, they whispered long and anxiously together whilst they drank it, but nothing could Mr. Jones make out, and he was very uneasy. But before long their voices were somewhat raised, and Mr. Jones caught ‘Twelve—be sure,’ and later on, ‘Drawing-room—front lawn’; but although this meant much, it did not arm him

fully as to the whole business ; and he was startled presently by Reynolds saying, ‘ Only a blind—safe upstairs.’

He could make neither head nor tail of it, and time was very precious, so he stretched himself, and rolled over on his form, until he finally rolled off—by mistake, of course ! and he gave a great yawn, rolled out of the house, and ran to his boat, making all speed to the other side, where he was soon in close council with Mr. Thompson as to the best way to meet the danger. It was quite impossible to avoid telling Lady Isabel ; so she was accordingly told of the threatened attack, and that the two dogs must be kept by her in her private room, where her jewel safe was, and that her valuable violin should be put there as well.

About eight of the men-servants were let into the secret, and were held in readiness to help ; but strict injunctions were laid on them to tell no one else, and the night wore on until about the time when Mr. Jones expected his

‘quarry,’ as he named the rascals. The house was in complete darkness; the whole body of defenders were hid in the drawing-room, Mr. Jones by one of the windows, which was, strange to say, left open! and he had a dark lantern in his hand, a six-chamber revolver by him, and, if one could have seen his face, a most determined look in it.

He was resolved, come what might, that this house should be rid of the villain who was a sort of nightmare to it; and he felt sure of success.

A little after twelve a slight noise was heard on the lawn, and then the window was very gently raised, when the two men Mr. Jones expected entered, and closed the window after them. A dark lantern was opened, and, like a flash of lightning, Mr. Jones opened *his*, and, with one bound, rushed on the notorious thief, both arms round him, and he held him as in a vice, only uttering one word, ‘Caught’; and while the others secured Reynolds, these two reeled about the room, now up, now

down, the thief actually using his teeth to try to free himself.

But the detective held on like a bulldog ; and when he was bleeding on both arms and hands, the servants at liberty managed to secure the other, and tie him hand and foot. The noise had awoke the whole house, and every one was astir, Lady Isabel and the dogs arriving with the rest ; and it was an impressive scene indeed ! Several had lamps in their hands, many were half-dressed, and all wore a scared look ; but the mingled aspect of fear and impudence in the face of Reynolds cannot be described, whilst Mr. Jones's particular prisoner fairly gnashed his teeth with rage, as the former again taunted him with ' Caught at last ! '

It was arranged that a strong force of the servants should sit up with Mr. Jones to guard the prisoners ; and in the morning they should be removed by first train to Ulverston, —which we may at once say was done ; and we may also anticipate the course of our story

by telling the reader that these two were convicted of attempt at robbery and heavily sentenced, and that the noted thief, for whose capture Mr. Jones received £100, was afterwards to undergo a very much heavier sentence for a serious crime.

CHAPTER XVII

Lost in the Snow

IT was the early part of the afternoon of the day following that on which Reynolds had been captured and removed,—a dull, ominous sort of day ; one on which any one given to presentiments might feel sure some ill was about to happen, and go about with a care on him which nothing would remove. The hills and woods looked more than usually solemn ; and a fitful, gusty wind tore round corners, and scattered a few very late oak leaves, along with an old twig or two and a miserable bit or two of straw, under the shelter of an old outhouse hard by.

In a word, there were decided indications of a severe snow-storm, and old Thompson had most respectfully urged this upon Lady Isabel,

as she prepared to leave home to pay a visit to an old invalid woman under the Fell—Gummer's How, in fact. She had laughed, but had warmly thanked the old man nevertheless, for his kindness, and had departed with Lion, carrying her basket of delicacies for the sufferer, but not before she had had a severe battle with Master Rat, who strongly resented being left at home. But at home he had to stop; and, as events turned out, he probably owed his life to doing so. Lord Walton and his friends were expected in the evening, and Lady Isabel left word that she should be home by dusk, and he was to excuse her if they returned before she did.

The magnificent Saint Bernard, Lion, strange to say, seemed reluctant to go from the house when they got into the grounds. He gave a very low growl or whine, and sniffed the air and paused several times, finally actually taking hold of Lady Isabel's dress with his teeth and pulling, on which she turned and said, 'What ails my old dog?'

The poor dumb brute, for answer, held up his monstrous head, and uttered a prolonged howl ; but Isabel caressed and coaxed him, until his better judgment was overridden, and they went on their way. But had this wonderful instinct been noticed and acted upon, how much suffering of mind and body might have been averted !

The swirling of leaves, oddments of dead grasses, and some superannuated bits of paper continued here and there as the lady and her dog walked at a brisk pace along the road leading to Bowness. It was most amusing to watch these things eddying round corners, sometimes perfectly motionless, at others making a spiral staircase, as it were, urged to do so by some small whirlwinds, and then on a sudden, swish ! and they raced along the road at a terrific pace. The dog watched these things, and once or twice sported with them, though he seemed to have no heart in it, but came back to his mistress, looking miserable.

And now the advanced guard of the terrible body of snow soon to come made its appearance, and Lady Isabel hurried on, wishful to administer what consolation she could to the old woman before any depth lay on the ground. And she was soon at the pine wood, through which she passed to the small cottage, hid entirely from road or mountain path or human habitation; and truly it was an errand of mercy indeed for one so high; but the thought of what a Greater had done for poor humanity swelled her kind heart, and little she cared for such abject poverty or its surroundings if, by a word or an action, she could ease a pain or soothe a stricken soul.

She found the old woman alone, her old husband being out in the woods; and after she had given her some nourishing food she took out her Bible and was soon deep in its glorious truths. The dog, Lion, do what she would, could not be induced to enter the cottage, but laid his huge body at the door

outside, and kept watch. The lady was deep in her reading, or she would have heard an occasional growl or howl from this wise animal, as the snow very perceptibly increased, as did also the wind, now becoming almost a hurricane. But she read on and on, until a savage howl from the dog, added to a growing darkness, made her pause and start from her seat, almost terrified at the appearance outside.

Wise had she been had she remained there until the fury of the storm had passed ; or, saving that, if she had retrod her way through the pine wood to the road. But she hastily bade the woman good-bye, and took the way by the foot of the fell leading to Town Head. Here, as might be expected, the gathered power of the storm was concentrated, and here she had to battle hard for even foot-hold—progress she made little or none, whilst the dog plodded by her, if he did make a stride or two, looking up anxiously the while with those magnificent eyes of his, and his

great tail lashing the whirling snow about in delight that they were going home.

But the deeper darkness came on, and the awful fury of the hurricane almost deprived Lady Isabel of motion or of thought, and, horror of horrors ! she struck her foot against a sharp stone and fell, her ankle dislocated, if not severely fractured. And there she lay in a dead swoon, the poor, heart-broken dog crouching by her, his body against hers, his huge paw over her, and his head nestling, oh, how like a human being's ! by her face, now ghastly and unconscious. And the snow continued to gather and thicken, until the dog and his poor mistress were more or less covered by it.

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Leaving Grasmere, our friends passed on to Ambleside, where his lordship's fine steam yacht was waiting. They made good progress down the lake as far as the ferry, when the first indications of the snow-storm appeared, but the wind being north-east did

not impede their progress, though the blinding snow, fine as salt, made steering no easy matter, and a thick darkness seemed about to overtake them. But it is not very dangerous work, this navigation of Windermere, and the boat was most skilfully handled; so they arrived at length, almost blinded by the snow, and entered the mansion once more.

It was precisely about the time of Lady Isabel's sad disaster that Lord Walton arrived at home, and he inquired at once for his sister, as she did not make her appearance. When informed where she had gone, he felt satisfied, though it was fast getting dark. But when she did not return later, and the storm was, if possible, worse, he grew anxious, finally deciding to go in quest of her.

'Put two of the strongest horses into one of the carriages at once,' he gave orders, 'and be at the door instantly. Add some wraps, for we do not know what may have happened.'

He put a flask of brandy in his coat, and, along with Jack Sinclair, was soon on the

road, though progress was very slow, as the carriage was soon almost imbedded in snow. Mr. Blane and Mr. Mutchinson had been left at the house, though they much wanted to accompany his lordship ; but the latter thought, and wisely, that if anything serious *had* occurred it was much better that space in the conveyance should be ample.

At length they arrived at Town Head, where his lordship alighted, and, painfully wading down the drive, inquired if his sister had called there ; but no, she had not, and they crawled on, at last reaching the pine wood. To get to the cottage was a terrible job, but at last they did it, and learned from the old woman that the lady had left there some time ago. The two gentlemen were now much alarmed, and they lost no time in fruitless surmises but made their way as fast as possible back to the carriage, which they turned towards home, thinking by this some news might have come there, or probably Lady Isabel herself.

Passing a gate leading from the road to the Fells the solemn howl of a dog was heard, and Lord Walton cried, 'That is Lion, and there must be danger, or worse.' He and Sinclair, with Sinclair's man, Johnie, who had come with the coachman, made as much haste as possible through the snow to where they supposed the dog and his mistress were; but it was weary and painful work, and their deep anxiety added to the trial. However, guided by the dog's repeated howling, at last they saw before them the prostrate form of Lady Isabel, still unconscious, and the noble hound just as we left him when she fell. Lord Walton fell on his knees and sobbed, 'Great and merciful God! spare my darling sister!' and at the same time he dashed the clinging snow from her lovely face and moistened her lips with brandy. As for poor Sinclair, he turned to the storm, and great tears ran down his cheeks, but he said never a word. 'She is alive—see, Jack, she is alive! Quick, let us carry her to the

carriage, you and I; and you, Johnie, fly as fast as you can and tell Captain Simpson to get up steam and go up to Bowness and bring back Doctor Prescott.' Johnie was off, before his lordship had finished, as best he could through the snow, and the two gentlemen bore their precious burthen to the carriage as gently as possible, where they placed her, though she gave a low moan as they did so, and it was soon evident that her foot was sadly hurt. The good dog *would not* leave her, so he entered the conveyance with them, and it was not long before the whole arrived at home.

CHAPTER XVIII

A Love Story

THE Doctor gave a serious report—the ankle was sprained, and there was a simple fracture of one small bone, added to which, from exposure, he was fearful that complications might arise. That every care was to be observed; and quiet and repose, he trusted, would soon have the effect of perfect restoration to health and strength.

In a day or two the house was cleared of all visitors, but Sinclair begged to be constantly informed of Lady Isabel's progress towards recovery, and reluctantly took his departure. 'T' owd Fossil' and Mr. Blane had promised to come on the Jubilee festival, and the former, for him, left with a decidedly long face.

Mr. Bolton, when informed of the accident to Lady Isabel, was very kind, and ran up in one of his yachts daily to inquire personally as to her state ; and Lord Walton was simply full of trouble. But careful nursing and a good constitution work wonders. Very soon, much sooner than any one expected, there was a decided change for the better, and the invalid was pronounced convalescent.

It was a happy day for her, and we think for Lion also, when the noble dog was allowed to come into her room, and lay his grand old head on the coverlet of her bed. She very gently stroked him as he raised his beautiful eyes to hers, and the tears came unchecked as she remembered how he had probably saved her life. There are times when any word spoken would seem to jar on the finer feelings, and this was one of them, for a mute salutation was all that passed between the dog and his mistress, and presently she closed her eyes in sleep. The dog sat watching,

and, if master Rat came up to the bed, and seemed disposed to jump up, as he was allowed to do, the St. Bernard just showed the edge of his teeth, when the terrier at once thought better of it, and walked off to the fire again.

Although convalescent, Lady Isabel did not regain strength rapidly—in fact, it was on the verge of spring ere she could take a short drive, well wrapped up ; and it was the middle of April before she was well enough to go, with Lord Walton and Sinclair, for a short run on the Continent, to which place the doctor had ordered her. When Lord Walton had named the subject to Jack, telling him he ‘ might come and keep a fellow company,’ Jack had in a most unaccountable manner — so thought his lordship — most eagerly jumped at the offer ; but had the brother of Isabel been able to look into the heart of Sinclair when he turned from the inanimate form lying in the snow, he need not have wondered ; but neither by look, or

word, or action had Jack let out the secret so suddenly revealed to himself. On the contrary he seemed more reticent every way, and had actually never a yarn to spin. But now he seemed to wake up a little, and was muttering to himself, 'shall now get out of the way of that cad Bolton!'

'What are you going to do about the House?' asked Jack of Lord Walton, as they were on their way to London.

'The House may just do without me until Bell is well and back home again. I don't for a moment suppose the affairs of the country will get into much more of a muddle than they are already just because *I* am absent. Anyway, I'm on leave of absence, and I'll be hanged if all the Whips in the world shall bring me back before this old woman is ready to return.'

'Very kind of you, Bob; but I don't suppose we need stay away long—you know we cannot be from home after the end of May, as so much will have to be looked after against

the Jubilee celebration, and then, how about the fiddle ?’

‘Well,’ put in Jack, ‘I had almost lost sight of that. But I have put a few good hands on the trail, and I hope we shall get hold of it again. Poor old Blane ! how I love the fellow for making such a gem !’ And he really seemed to mean it. And truly, the man who produces a true work of art *is* to be loved, and *ought* to be loved ; for if the thing created be a ‘joy for ever,’ surely the creator of it is worthy of affection ! But how seldom does the heart thrill with rapture at thought of the mind which, out of chaos, wrought a lovely and undying form ?

Six weeks would not suffice for a wide travel, so it was decided that Paris should be touched only, and that they should spend at least three weeks in Italy, and at Naples. There had been some discussion as to whether they should make Genoa, Leghorn, or Naples their resting-place ; and little any of them thought how powerfully their selection of

Naples would affect the future of them all, and of another dear to them all, and of one yet unknown. But so it was to be, as we shall hasten to record.

Lady Isabel was weary after so long a journey, and sought repose for a couple of days, after which the various objects of interest were visited, and the shores of the loveliest bay in the world were constantly sought; thus it fell out that Jack and Lady Isabel were often there, when Lord Walton, under pretence of urgent business correspondence, stayed within-doors. And it also fell out that on one particular occasion they had wandered far from all beholders, and were idly watching the lapping of the tide, or gathering, as do children, pebbles and shells. After a long silence between them, Jack said, 'Bell—are you happy?'

'Happy, yes—at least, I am not particularly—why?'

'Because you have a far-away look that is new to you and new to me. May I say

something to you—not to distress you, Bell; but I feel I must let you know how latterly my heart has opened and absorbed your dear self. Do not expect an impassioned appeal from me—but may I say how I love you? and may I—nay, do not turn away—you know not how your answer will affect me. Bell, may I hope?’

Lady Isabel gave a low sob, and she merely held out her hand to Jack, and gave him just one look, when like lightning she was folded in his arms. And this sudden outpour had been the growth of years! and now the flood-gates were open, there shone a light in the eyes of each not seen there before. And it was noticed that Jack took to his yarns again after they had dined that day, much to Lord Walton’s surprise; but when Jack wrung his hand and told him all, his lordship gave a long whistle and simply said, ‘You lucky dog!’

And rather singularly, two days after, Lord Walton received a formal offer for the hand of

Lady Isabel from Mr. Bolton (to whom his lordship had written), and it was no little satisfaction for the latter to be able to say that she was affianced to Jack Sinclair. Not that any of them thought really ill of Mr. Bolton : on the contrary, he was by no means so black as some would have him painted, as his after conduct fully proved.

We have said that Lord Walton kept much within-doors, and he had a very good reason for so doing ; it was this. The day on which they had entered the hotel where they were staying, he had been much astonished by meeting in one of the corridors a most beautiful and elegant young lady, with a violin in her hand, hurrying to call some one to the assistance of her mother, who was taken suddenly ill. ‘May I offer my assistance?’ asked he, in Italian.

And she had replied, ‘I thank you, if you will see that a doctor attends instantly.’

And this was all, at the moment ; but the remembrance of the girl haunted him, and

he made what inquiries he could with propriety.

It appeared she was the celebrated violinist that had caused such a sensation throughout Italy, and her name was Celina Verelli ; that she lived with her mother and a maid, and that her conduct was most blameless. She was to appear at a grand concert to be given specially for her, on the following day, and it was not long before three places were secured by Lord Walton. But every one was surprised on the sudden removal of the invalid lady and the violinist from the hotel to another which could not be ascertained. However, on the night of the concert, the gifted Celina roused the Italians to a high pitch of delight, and our English friends were in raptures.

She played Mendelssohn's Concerto in E minor, and that exquisite Polonaise in A major by Wieniawski, in a manner that made Jack Sinelair open his mouth, and Lord Walton glow with delight ; while Lady Isabel was almost in tears of rapture. To say that the

lady received a perfect ovation is simply the truth; but she had a strangely dejected air, and, as she left the stage, she just acknowledged the marked applause of Lord Walton by a slight smile, which thrilled him through. That there was some mystery here was evident; for, when Lord Walton, after tracing the young lady to her hotel, sent up his card, and politely asked to be informed of the health of the mother, the elder lady had returned an answer to the effect that she was now well, and desired that no more inquiries might be made by his lordship, as she and her daughter desired perfect seclusion.

But it was not long before an event brought all to light, at least to one of our characters, and it was this. On the second appearance of Celina, the theatre was densely crowded, and the enthusiasm profound; but, as the lady was playing a Gavotte of Bach, there was a low murmur through the house, and then a startled look in every face, as the word 'Fire' ran from floor to ceiling and from

ceiling to floor. Celina stopped, and the whole place was soon what it is impossible to describe; but a lady rushed on the stage, and, flinging her arms about Celina, bore her away by the wings—and Lord Walton at once guessed it to be her mother. Then, the manager rushed to the front of the stage and shouted that there was no fire—and he at last stilled the storm, but at the same time stated that the mother of Celina was taken most alarmingly ill through fright, and that her daughter could not again appear. This, of course, stopped the concert, as it was evident that it was to hear this wonder that most, if not all had attended.

And so Lord Walton grew from a somewhat cold member of society into a downright anxious and passionate lover, and in love with one with whom he had only spoken a few words, and of whom he knew nothing! But he was soon to know something that added fuel to the fire, and caused him most intense astonishment, sorrow, and very deep anxiety.

CHAPTER XIX

A Discovery and a Confession

ON the following morning Lord Walton received a note in the third person from no other than the beautiful Celina, which stated that her mother was most dangerously ill, and that she requested that his lordship would visit her without delay, as she had something of moment to impart to him. To him this seemed most strange, after the curt manner in which his advances had been met; but he lost no time in complying with the wishes of the lady, and was very soon seated by her bedside. Celina was there and the nurse, but both withdrew on the entrance of his lordship, and the invalid spoke—

‘You are, I am sure, much surprised that I should have sought this interview. I feel I

have not long to live, and I must do justice to the living whilst I have the power. When you arrived I saw your name in the hotel books, and that of your sister and—Mr. Sinclair. Lord Walton, my sudden flight from the same roof is explained in these words—I am the guilty wife of Sir John Sinclair, and my daughter is *his* daughter!’

‘Oh, how you distress me!’ said his lordship.

‘But I am compelled to distress you, and to urge you to note my last wishes, and, for the love of the God that I have so defied, to most sacredly observe them. Celina was but an infant when I fled, and she believes that my seducer was her father. Take her when I am gone to England, under the care of your sister. Should her father, after all is explained, cast her off, then do not enlighten her as to her parentage, but let her follow her musical career. Do not on any account explain to your sister or Mr. Sinclair who she is, but tell them that you had promised to see her

to some relative in England at my dying request.'

'But you may recover, Lady Sinclair,' urged Lord Walton.

'Never ; that I feel and know, and do not call me any more by the name of the good man I have so shamed. Tell him that not once but a thousand times I have most sincerely repented, and take this attested paper to him from me.'

It was evident that she was fast sinking, so Lord Walton departed, after assuring her that all that man could do should be done by him, and that he hoped for a favourable turn in her malady. But this was not to be, for before night she had breathed her last, and the doctor declared her death to be due to heart-disease.

When her remains had been consigned to the grave, Lord Walton had a difficult duty to perform, the more so, as he had to keep his own feelings strictly in his own breast. But he did, and about the end of

May they were all once more on the shores of old Windermere, and Lady Isabel and Celina were fast friends. As to Jack, he could not make it out. He said to Lord Walton one day, 'What's up, Bob? Can't a fellow be trusted? Don't think I'm going to be spooney on the young woman; but you can surely hang her out for a chap to stare at a bit. Who and what is she? She *can* fiddle, and that's a fact; but blest if there isn't a nail loose somewhere.'

'You'll know as much as I know before long; wait, that's all.'

'Oh, it's all very fine waiting; but you will admit that people will begin to stare and then talk.'

'And let them; but they'd better take care *I* neither see nor hear them,' exclaimed his lordship, flushing angrily.

'That's the small amusement, is it?' queried Jack, slyly poking the other in the side. 'But you are a deeper fish than I thought you, Bob; old William is nowhere.'

‘What do you mean? But you are an ass, Jack, so I forgive you. Now, seriously; will you give my warmest regards to Sir John, and ask him to please come back to-morrow with you to hear this most wonderfully gifted violinist. I most particularly want his fine judgment, as it may be of serious moment to her future.’

‘How?’ asked Jack.

‘Well, in many ways; that’s enough at present. Off with you, and mind your own business; and, look here, don’t you go keeping that sister of mine so much to yourself; she isn’t your property yet, and so look out.’

Jack gave his friend a sly look, and after a few moments with his affianced, left for Ambleside.

CHAPTER XX

At Ghyll Foot Again

ON the evening of the following day—just at that time of advanced spring when the perfume of flowers and the breeze from the wild fells makes the fortunate one who inhales it think it a boon to live—in the music drawing-room of Ghyll Foot were seated Lady Isabel, Miss Sinclair (as we must now call her), and Lord Walton. They had just played one of Mozart's fine trios for piano-forte, violin, and violoncello, and they were discussing the merits of the composition.

It was early twilight, and objects began to grow somewhat less defined as the gloom gathered, and it was just at this moment that Sir John Sinclair and Jack were announced. The heart of Lord Walton beat

rapidly as he rather hastily introduced the stranger by her Italian name, observing to the lady that the Baronet was a fine judge of the violin and of classical music. And father and daughter stood face to face in the dusk, and not a flutter disturbed either. But when the room was lighted Sir John gazed long and earnestly at the stranger, and was observed to turn suddenly pale and lean his head on his hand, seeing which Lord Walton stooped over him, and very gently whispered if he could bear a very great surprise and a strong emotion ?

‘Yes, yes,’ said the Baronet; ‘for the love of God, what is it, and who is *she* ?’

And then all, or what sufficed for the moment, was told, and there was not a dry eye in that room as father and daughter were clasped convulsively in each other’s arms. And there was no thought of music after this, for the time being ; but there was a something holy and pure in the subdued converse until all had retired to rest that soothed with calm

delight. And the Baronet on his pillow forgave his dead wife, and took his child to his heart; and the lovely daughter on *her* pillow breathed a prayer that she might be spared to minister to the good old man; and Lord Walton at last sank to repose with her image in his heart and her name on his lips; and Lady Isabel sighed with mixed feelings of surprise and pleasure, not forgetting Jack as she closed her eyes; and the object of her affection dropped off to sleep with this—‘It must be a dream! but if it is I shall lose a cousin! Well, of all the goes! and the dear old boy, how he wept! Bless me! I must have got a cold; my eyes are fairly watering!’

The post on the following day brought a characteristic letter from Mr. Mutchinson for Mr. John Sinclair, as follows:—

‘Can you run over to Barnsley for a day, as I find several of Blane’s fiddles here, and it is possible yours may be one of them, as one never knows through what dirty hands these

things go before they get into clean ones. Not that our chaps here are particularly given to using too much soap, but they are pretty fairish all round, so let that pass. If you will come I will get our band in good trim, and we will rasp off some of all sorts, and there will be no end of a smell of rosin.

‘ Will you give my sincere regards to Lady Isabel and Lord Walton, and your good old uncle when you see him,’ etc., etc.

To which Jack replied that he would run over. His lordship the same day received an urgent telegram from the House, stating that a most important division was expected that evening, and he must go at all costs ; in fact, it was a ‘ whip of scorpions,’ so Jack said, and they both arranged to travel as far as Carnforth together, when they would separate, one going on to London and the other to Barnsley.

So Lady Isabel, Miss and Sir John Sinclair, were left for a day or two ; but they passed a pleasant time, the father and daughter frequently out together or in-doors in happy

discourse, and Lady Isabel writing herself all the invitations to the festival on the 22nd instant, or personally visiting every one, whether carriage people or peasant, as she was always most particular on an occasion of this sort to depute the task to no one else. Consequently, the deserving poor or middle class felt proud to be asked, and the firm bond of love was strengthened between class and class.

From the outline laid down by Isabel and her brother the festivities would be grand. There was to be a procession of boats and steamers from Lake Side to Waterhead and back, a salute of twenty-one guns before starting, and on the return a cold luncheon to every one on the lawn and in the house; a monster garden-party, then a knife-and-fork tea, then dancing, fireworks, and three cheers for every one at the end—Her Most Gracious Majesty first.

And so Lady Isabel had her hands full, and so would cook and Thompson when the day

drew near, for all was to be on the most munificent scale, and all was to be provided at home.

There was just one nice attention paid by her ladyship to real merit, and this was a letter written by herself to Mr. Jones, asking him to present her compliments to his chief, and would he allow the former to visit them on the occasion of the Jubilee. And Mr. Jones had written with a full heart that he was most highly honoured and grateful, and would come. And somehow cook got to hear of this, and let it out to Polly, and she had a rare time of it, I can tell you, for this same Polly could tease with a vengeance! However, all was, as usual, good nature, and all were brimful of expectation, of happiness.

When Jack arrived at Barnsley he was met by 'T'owd Fossil,' and driven to the most hospitable home of the latter, where he was made right welcome. And the sights of the town were shown, and all the fiddles that were known to be made by Blane were seen,

but none of them was that lost by Sinclair, so they just gave it up as a bad job for the present, and settled down in the evening to a 'right good do' of catgut, etc., as Mr. Mutchinson put it. And it was no mean array of talent that met in the large room in which our friend had his quartettes, etc. About twenty excellent professionals and amateurs made a respectable band, and 'The Maid of the Mill' led on to the 'Blue Danube,' etc., etc. Jack was in full force as leader (by courtesy), and he asked Mr. Mutchinson if they could not raise a bit of 'classical.'

'Ay, my lad, we's get on to that—we're *none in tune yet.*'

At which Jack laughed. But presently they reached a symphony by Haydn; and then interval first, during which some good cheer was handed round, and pipes, etc., had out. Then Jack gave them yarn number one :—

'You will most of you remember the

original Victoria Station, Manchester, when you could be sure of seeing your train as you got your ticket, not as now, where you have to rush about under tunnels and hunt about up alleys for your particular platform. A friend of mine, a professor of the violin, was on one occasion in those days going to Yorkshire, and had taken his seat in a train, with his violin-case by his side. Just as they were about to move, a young Lancashire lad jumped in, saying, 'That were a narrow shave, mester.' He puffed away after his run for the train, and sat mopping at his head for ever so long. But presently he got a bit cool, when he took notice of my friend's fiddle-case. "What han yo gotten theer?" he asked.

"A violin," replied the other.

"A what? A veeolin? A'll gie thee three-horpence to let us have a look at it."

"Certainly," said my friend, as he pocketed the money, with a laugh, and handed the other the instrument.

"What does tha ca' it—a veeolin? Why,

mon, it's *nobbut a bit of a fiddle*. Gie us that three-horpence back, or *a' ll cut bant*.'"'

At this there was a loud roar of laughter, and 'Towd Fossil' said it wasn't bad—for Windermere. Then they got on again with something light, and then they rendered last of all that masterpiece, the 'Jupiter Symphony' of Mozart, after which they had refreshments and a pipe, and Jack gave them his concluding yarn:—

'There was once a grocer lived at Oldham, who had been for some time suspected of using light weights, but, pounce upon him as they would, the inspectors never found any on the premises. But it so happened that the man had a very fine grey parrot given him, which before long became a rare talker and a great noticer of what was going on daily in the shop. The grocer had always a scout looking after the inspectors, and one day he got wind of them as usual, and quietly took the light weights into the cellar.

'In due course the inspectors entered, found

all right, and were departing, when Miss Polly calls out, "Light weights are not i' t' shop; light weights are i' t' cellar." One inspector said to the other, "Do you hear that bird? There's something wrong." "Nonsense," replied the other, "who takes notice of a parrot?" But again the same cry, "Light weights are i' t' cellar." "I'm sure there's something in it," exclaimed the suspicious inspector, and down they went and found the unjust weights; so the grocer was heavily fined and cautioned.

'When the men had left the shop, the bird kept saying, "Pretty Poll, pretty Poll." "Ay," said the grocer, "I'll gie thee pretty Poll. I'll teach thee to cry light weights—come out," and he got hold of poor Poll, and, wringing her neck, threw her on the ashpit outside. But parrots, like cats and women and fiddlers, are not so easily killed, and Miss Poll was not quite done for. After she had wriggled there for a bit, she managed to get on her feet and twist her neck straight, in

doing which she spied a dead cat lying beside her. She looked down sideways at the thing, and said, "Hast tha bin saying summat about light weights?"'

CHAPTER XXI

The Fiddle Found

MR. BOLTON had invited, for the 20th, the whole of those staying at Lord Walton's to a musical-party at his fine residence, Wray Castle. Of course, this included Jack Sinclair; and as Mr. Blane was staying there and 'T'owd Fossil,' they accompanied the others, for Mr. Bolton particularly wished the violin-maker to see his fine collection; and Mr. Bolton wished to hear the gifted Miss Sinclair, and to see whether all was true of her genius that was alleged. So on that day, early, they were there assembled, and this remarkable modern triumph of architecture was shown with pride by its owner.

Few would imagine what a noble pile really

existed who saw it merely from the lake. The solid towers and the fluting of pillars, with the elegant tracery of windows and the finely developed archways, were interspersed here and there with a startling ivy-clad ruin, so like age that we use the word 'startling' advisedly; and a deserted moss and grass-overgrown court came suddenly upon you, and you felt as though old age and youth were there in peace—and so, in reality, it was peace; and the exquisite view of lake and mountain gave a wondrous confirmation of this, the rich and varied foliage framing the whole picture—a picture, be it observed, none the less lovely for being in England.

It was a splendid day, and the guests were, some in the spacious grounds, some in the superbly furnished apartments of the Castle, evidently in the full enjoyment of the scene; but presently all were assembled in the large music-room, in several fine cabinets of which were the valuable violins forming Mr. Bolton's rare collection. It was the host's intention to

show them to those most interested later on, and to get through as much concerted and solo music as soon as possible. Therefore, not to weary the non-musical reader, we may say that much good work was done, and Miss Sinclair took every one by storm. But our particular business lies in showing the collection of instruments, and in what followed as the last was shown.

Mr. Bolton handed every violin, etc., first to Mr. Blane, as the acknowledged professional expert of the party, and he prefaced each by a short account of the same. 'This,' he began, 'is an example of Bergonzi—Michael Angelo, not the greater maker of that name, Carlo. It is a somewhat rough specimen, but full of character. And this is by the Great Bergonzi—how noble in outline and curve and rich in varnish, I am sure you will admit. You see he carries his sound-hole low, and his peculiar sweep of middle bout is him all over. Then there is a Storioni—truly a rough diamond; as to tone, it is

superb. Here we have a David Techlar, a poor fellow bandied about Italy, but whose works are gems. This is a 'cello by J. B. Rugerius, and a viola by Lupot. This is a violin, almost unique for beauty and tone, by Lorenzo Guadagnini; and this is by Fransceso Ruggieri. And now I will show you a Stainer said to be one of the Electors. Is not that fine? And how do you like this Andreas Amati, or this Antonius and Hieronimus? But what are they beside this great one of the Amati family, Nicholas?'

'This was in the Thornley collection,' said Mr. Blane; 'it is a noble fiddle.'

'Yes, and so was this, by the same maker,' went on Mr. Bolton. 'Mr. Thornley brought them both from Italy, along with several others. This 'cello is by Nicholas also, and is of fine tone, though you will notice the work, for him, is very indifferent. And now we are getting into deep water, for we come to a Joseph Guarneri of the third class, and to another by him of a better style, and

here we have about the finest specimen I have seen of this genius.'

'Yes, I have seen it before,' said Mr. Blane; 'it was in the Plowden collection, and is almost unique. The varnish is absolutely alive.'

'Then here is a Stradivari, 1687—not by any means a striking fiddle any way, but it certainly is genuine. And now we come to this Strad. quartette, the 'cello alone being worth a small fortune; and the violin is a masterpiece, though I have seen much finer violins by him.'

'Really, Mr. Bolton, you almost take one's breath away,' Mr. Blane said; 'but I see a violin there which you have always kept back—what is that?'

'Ah! that is my gem—my centre—my last addition. It is the one of which you may remember me speaking when we were dining at his lordship's house after hunting. There—*that* is a fiddle, if ever one deserved the name.'

Mr. Blane took the instrument in his hand. Without a word he walked to the farther end of the room, where a large window opened from ceiling to floor, and there he gazed at the masterpiece for fully five minutes without speaking. Then he slowly returned to the wondering group, gave the violin into the hands of Jack Sinclair, and said—

‘Mr. Bolton, *that* fiddle was made by *me*, and it is the one stolen from the house of Lord Walton.’

‘Sir, how dare you!’ began Mr. Bolton, in a white heat. ‘But I beg your pardon—here is my hand. You are my guest, and you ought to know your own work; but I gave four hundred and fifty pounds for that instrument to Mr. Touche, who supplied me with pedigree and certificates and his written guarantee. But if there is law to be had in this land, this shall be sifted to the dregs! Forgive me, my friends, this outburst, but it is a terrible shock, not for its money value, but that I should be so thoroughly imposed upon.’

As to Jack Sinclair, he was just wild with delight. We were about to say he threw up his hat, but he could not do that, as they were indoors; but he threw up his handkerchief, and grasped Blane with one hand and Mr. Bolton with another, saying, 'All honour to you, old man; and the hopes of you' (to Mr. Bolton) 'giving a rascal a sound thrashing. Of course, the instrument is the one made for me, but altered so that its own father might well stare at it as he did. But I see a serious law business here, and come what may, you may depend on me, and on us all, I am sure.'

Lord Walton assured Mr. Bolton that to the extent of anything in his power he should insist on the strongest measures being taken. It was disgraceful, it was abominable; but possibly this would have the effect of stopping the nefarious practices that so many said were being resorted to in the sale of old instruments.

'No, Walton, I must challenge that,' said Sinclair. 'Speaking for London, no fairer or more honest dealing exists; and, knowingly,

nothing spurious is offered as genuine. There *have* been black sheep ; but I am certain, so far from their rascality being condoned, our fine body of experts are doing everything to expose it.'

So the party came to an end, but not before Mr. Bolton had said publicly before all to Mr. Blane, ' When I said that *that* fiddle deserved the name if ever one did, I meant every word ; and allow me to say further, that if you *are* the maker of it and it is proved so, I shall honour you to my dying day, and my prejudices will be cast to the winds '

CHAPTER XXII

The Jubilee

THE 22nd of June was brilliant in the extreme, as it had been for several days before it; in fact, it was hotter than it often is in August, and there was every prospect of a glorious celebration of Her Majesty's Jubilee. We must, for the moment, confine our description of the festivities to the neighbourhood in which our characters are located; but we may just mention that beacon fires were to be the special feature of the whole affair in the north, and that the one on Gummers How, exactly opposite Lake Side Station, on the other side of the water, was to be the signal for all others north of it to light up. Consequently, apart from the grand gathering at the house of Lord Walton, there

was expected an immense concourse of people on the western shores of the lake. And they assembled early to witness the procession of boats from Lake Side, all in gala attire, and all brimful of holiday excitement.

At ten o'clock precisely the fine steamer yacht of Lord Walton fired her first of the twenty-one gun salute; and, when all had boomed and had been answered by the thousand hills around, there were three hearty cheers given for Her Majesty, after which the order of procession was arranged. Lord Walton's yacht led, and it was followed by some twenty others, large and small, and on board there was a fine military band, which, as they weighed anchor, struck up 'God Save the Queen.'

We have only to do with those on board the leading steamer, and it was crowded with about the jolliest lot of human beings that could have been brought together in such a space and on such an occasion. All our special friends were there; and we heard one

who had seen him at Christmas and at the Hunt cry out to another, 'Yonder he is—that rum old stick from Yorkshire. We's be having some fun as *he's* here.'

Well, Lake Side is left, and at not too quick a pace the imposing snake of boats glides through the transparent water. On the right is Gummers How, nestling at the foot of which is Town Head; opposite, the woods and the hills of Graythwaite, and the *locale* of Graythwaite Hall, the seat of — Sandys, Esq. Then, further to the right, and magnificently wooded, the ancient Storres Hall; and again, on the western side, the hills of Sawrey, and the magnificently timbered one towering over the Ferry Hotel. At this place there is a short stoppage, and much shouting and cheering, and, it is needless to say, drinking of healths, etc. But they got on soon, and lovely Belle Isle, on the left, clothed in those rich greens so peculiar to June and to this lake, glides past, and the 'half-way house,' as 'T'owd Fossil' calls Bowness, is reached,

where another and longer pause is made. And here an addition is made to the procession, and another salute, and three more cheers.

‘If we only have some wind for to-night, I don’t care a rap,’ burst out our Yorkshire friend; ‘but it’s my opinion, if those handicap races have to come off on your lawn, my lord, and any dancing is to be done, it’s about time we gave over this “three cheering.” It’s dry work, at its best, and I’ll have a pint. Come on, Mr. John, and don’t look so like a big spooney—now you’re in love, you’re only like a baby.’

As he said this he made the best of his way to the place where refreshments were to be had *ad lib.*, Jack after him helter-skelter, and the latter got hold of the ears of the other and gave them a pinch. Fossil pretended he was insulted, and threw off his coat, squaring up to Jack, saying, ‘Come on, if you are six foot two! Blest if he isn’t afraid!’ Jack had thrown himself on a seat, bursting with

laughter ; and thus they went on, the dear old face of the Yorkshireman the sure precursor of merriment wherever seen.

As they approached Wray Castle, one of the guns there saluted the boats, and the compliment was returned by Lord Walton, and alternate firing passed rapidly. Then Mr. Bolton was seen to leave the shore in his steam yacht and join the procession. From just this particular place on the lake there is, perhaps, about as exquisite a view as can be seen anywhere of water, wood, and mountain ; and, although we prefer the same scene after rain, yet even on a hot day, as this was, there is a wonderful beauty in every feature. The marked undulations about Ambleside, Rydal, and the adjoining hills lead up to the boldness of the magnificent Langdale Pikes, and the frowning heights over which towers Scafell ; and the lazy air seems to be in no hurry to make way for the one who gazes to behold them closer. But the outlines, though somewhat dim, are mapped out truly, some

brown, some blue, some purple, and over all is the cloudless sky.

After rounding the extreme head of the lake, and firing a salute, the return journey is made, and before long the foot of the water is reached, and the grounds of Lord Walton's residence are soon alive with visitors. Luncheon here and luncheon there—every one eating as best he or she could—all is but as a 'put on' until the real business of the day begins. A few attempts at wrestling, running, and jumping are made—but, as one country lad put it, 'it was up to nowt'; and 'Fossil' said 'he hadn't got his rosin on yet—wait a bit, and he'd show 'em how to run and dance.' And sure enough he did—later on.

Carriage after carriage, horseman after horseman, and pedestrians everywhere. Soon the beautiful grounds, to which we referred in our opening pages, were gay in the June sun, and every face spoke of pleasure. Before the more serious festivities began, the substantial repast called 'Tea' was ordered,

and great was the fun and the noise; but the more there was of both the more delight they seemed to give Lord Walton and his sister. And Jack was literally everywhere, 'Fossil' declaring him 'clean cracked!' And that individual went about beaming on every one, mopping his jolly face every minute, tears running down occasionally, if a more than usual fit of merriment seized him.

Presently, Lord Walton, Jack, and 'Fossil' were seated at one of the tables; and it so happened that some of the men of Ellwood, the carrier, coming in late from their round, sat down at the same, and fell to with a will. 'Now,' said Jack, 'there'll be some fun.' He had scarcely said this, in an undertone, to the others, when one of the men seized a pie about four pounds weight, and helped himself to *half*; another took the remains of a ham (about three pounds) on his plate, while a third asked his lordship, 'wad he gie him about a quarter ov a stean o' that beef.' Seeing what a game was on, our three friends waited on these honest, hungry fellows, and

they laughed and roared with them, and fed them to their hearts' content. And one of the carriers said, 'Now, we's just manage about haue a gallon apiece, please yer lordship—swipes, nowt else.'

And who could help roaring over such work? And then they lighted their pipes, and roamed about, as happy as the best of them.

Do not suppose, my readers, that I have stretched a point in the foregoing—far otherwise, for these honest fellows *can* eat, and are not ashamed of putting by such quantities as those described. They sometimes rise at three o'clock in the morning and never see bed before midnight, and are often wet through during the whole of the day. What wonder then, that, to keep up animal strength and heat, they should use such abundant fuel? And Lord Walton was more pleased to see such men so heartily enjoy his hospitality, than he would have been to see the Duke of Westminster nibble at the same table.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Bonfires

IT was a gay scene. All the tables and refreshments had been moved to side places in the grounds, and groups were here, there, and everywhere.

About five o'clock, the first indication of coming events showed itself in a 'tussle' between two athletic wrestlers, and then a short race between boys, and another between girls. Then a steam 'merry-go-round' (ordered specially by his lordship), was patronised by all, high and low ; and to see Jack, 'Fossil,' and his lordship sit the horses with their faces to the tails convulsed all ; but, when 'Fossil' got hold of a fiddle and sawed away on it, going all the while round and round, people danced again with delight, and

some laughed so that they had to go away with their hands to their sides.

Presently the races began in earnest, and for the end of these, the handicap. Lady Isabel was the handicapper, and she did her work well. In the first heat (three times round all the lawns) there were about a dozen, the winner being Jack Sinclair, as, with his great stride, one might have expected; then again, Lord Walton; then that dear old friend of the writer's, Roger Knowles, of the 'Swan,' Newby Bridge; then 'Fossil'; then Mr. Bolton; and last, one of the three carriers! And it was no slight job for her ladyship to fairly start these—to be fair; but she had a small sack of *potatoes* tied to the back of her brother; Jack had to carry a baby over the whole course; Mr. Bolton had to give 'Fossil' ten yards and Roger Knowles fifteen, and so on. To see them getting ready for the start! 'Fossil' had his coat off long ago; now he took off his waistcoat, tied his braces round his waist, a red handkerchief round his head,

and off they go! First round, Jack first, baby yelling like a wild Indian; second round, Lord Walton first, but he does not seem to like the potatoes; but at the final round 'Fossil' leads and wins,—red in the face as the sun.

After this there was great laughing and promenading; and then dancing began in places. But there were several games here and there, and much merriment, perhaps the chief centre of the fun being in a scratch race got up for cook and several other women present. Our jovial friends got to hear of this, and very soon were there; and it was 'Well done, cook!' 'Weel done, Betty—but thoo con go!' etc., etc. Polly was amongst them, and it was good to see cook strain every nerve rather than that she should pass her! And Jack would not rest until he had got a race on between cook and 'Fossil'! And how the dear old chap did enjoy it! He gave her ten yards in a short spin, and she beat him.

Getting on for dusk, the main part of the company prepare to ascend Gummerts How, where the beacon fire is to be lighted, and from which place would be seen many of those lighted on distant mountains.

Through the woods and over the open Fell Lord Walton leads the charming Miss Sinclair. The tender light of closing day and the glories of surrounding objects,—hill, forest, lake, and purpling far-off mountain; the panting of slowly cooling heat, and the bleat of a disturbed sheep, are conducive to tender emotions and enhance those in the breast of his lordship. They seem each to understand the other, and they pick their way over dune, bog, or heather, silent, though it would seem some unspoken sentiment engaged the heart of each. And they reach the top of the fine old Fell, where Colonel Watson has had a monster pile built, which is to be the beacon for this end of Windermere. The lonely old mountain is not lonely now, for hundreds of eager sightseers are on his crest,

and merry laugh and joke are heard where solitude is wont to hold her sway.

Far away Pendle Hill at last shoots up his signal rocket, and soon follows one from crown-capped Ingleboro, then some intervening, and now old Gummers How throws up his, and his fire is lighted, and soon the licking tongues of flame roar high up, and a great pall of cloud smoke hovers over them. And answering fires flash from hill and hill, far, even to old Skiddaw; and there is a sort of creeping comes over one as these fires spring into life, they having been for so many years unkindled. And here and there a great shower of rockets shoots into the deepening blue, or a light of red, or blue, or green; but, when none of these startling effects arise, richer the waves of colour o'er valley and mountain become, and seem still more to bespeak solitude.

The scene on the top of this weather-beaten old Fell is one of almost utter abandonment and frolic. At first, the intense heat kept

every one at a most respectful distance, and a very wide ring indeed was the result. But as the night wore on, the people gradually drew closer until they joined hands, young and old, rich and poor, and the first thing they did was to sing, 'God Save the Queen.' Our old dalesman was there, and he shouted out, 'Gie it tongue, lads,' and tongue they *did* give it! What the rabbits and hares thought of this invasion of their property I know not; but there was the distant bark of a dog-fox, and, in response, a chorus of 'Yow-ow-ow-ow's' from Lord Walton's kennel at the foot of the hill, and sundry whirring of pheasants and a long, weird cry of the mournful owl.

Still hand in hand, first one ditty and then another is gone through, 'D'ye ken John Peel,' being bravely done; then a madrigal, then a catch, then something else. Soon all are seated on rough logs all about, and ale and wine and no end of good eating is the order of the—night, well, night be it, but no one cares to call *this* night. Oh, they were

so happy, and so truly English, and so thoroughly keeping all in bounds! for how can there be real enjoyment where laxity prevails? There is a fiddle: of *course* there is a fiddle! Do you suppose we were going to have such a scene as this and no fiddle? Besides, who ever heard of the writer being where there was *not* a fiddle? Now, none of your insinuations, or—well, never mind—let us get on. Yes, there was a fiddle, and Mr. Jones had brought with him from London two pairs of bones; and one of the footmen had dragged up a board on which to dance, and soon the College Hornpipe, with bones obbligate, is being rasped out lustily, and we venture to say that old Gummers How will be a long time before another such dance is done on his head. After this, another turn about; and then some begin to tell yarns, Jack presently giving a fine graphic sketch.

‘I never told you, uncle,’ he said to Sir John, ‘that I had sold “Kicker”?’

‘No. To whom? and I hope you gave him no character?’ replied his uncle.

‘Well, you shall hear, for the whole affair is worth listening to, I can tell you. You must know, ladies and gentlemen, that “Kicker” is the name earned by a magnificent thoroughbred hunter, lately the property of Sir John Sinclair, and one day last week a gentleman called, with his groom, to inspect this animal. Jim, one of our men, brought the beast out, saddle and bridle on, and all complete. The gentleman walked up to him at once. Jim shouted, “If yer valleys yer legs, sir, kep out o’ geat!” I told the stranger what the man meant, and advised him not to go too near the animal, for he was a regular—demon—that isn’t swearing, is it? The stranger took very little notice of what we said, but just told Jim to take off the saddle, and put on a stronger curb, if he had one. Then he told his groom to bring him his crocodile-skin leggings. These he put on, and, with a run like lightning, was on the

bare back of the brute before one could say, "Jack Robinson."

'Bare-backed?' asked Sir John.

'Bare-backed, uncle, and, as it turned out, wisely so. But I must just say that he had a large, heavy whip, and terrible spurs; for (he told me afterwards) he had heard a pretty full account of his Majesty, and he meant to ride him, and *tame* him, too. Well, you should have seen the *start* Kicker gave when the gentleman was on his back, but in a second he was straight up on his hind legs, pawing the air with his fore. Jim yelled out, "Git off un—he'll be on his back." "No, he won't," replied the other, as he dug his spurs in the animal, and thrashed him as I never saw horse yet thrashed. This brought my lord down on all fours again, when he tried everything he knew to unseat the rider, but all of no avail. He rushed up against the stable wall to break his legs, but he was drawn aside by a hand of iron on the terrible curb, and thrashed and spurred until he was

nearly mad. Then he made a frantic rush and cleared the six-barred gate of the yard, a thing I do not believe has ever been done before.'

'Never,' put in Sir John.

'Then he literally flew round and round the fifteen-acre field close at hand, the knees of the rider hard in his sides, and his leggings literally imbedded in the skin as though it had been a rasp—as, indeed, it was. Very soon Kicker was one mass of foam, and the rider shouted as he passed the gate for the last time, "Keep clear, as I shall cross and jump next time," which he did, magnificently, and Kicker was there, quiet as a child, and trembling in every limb!'

'Poor, poor thing!' exclaimed several ladies, and tears were actually in the eyes of some.

'Well, I was sorry for the horse; but really it was doing him a service to master him, as no one could live with him, and as to mounting him! The gentleman went to him after alighting, and patted him and called him a

noble steed; and he told Jim to do just so-and-so, and go up to London with him at once—if I would kindly allow him. He lunched with me and handed me a cheque for one thousand pounds.’

‘And his name?’ asked Sir John.

‘The Duke of Bedford. And I dare be sworn there is not such another horseman in the world!’

‘And he is as brave as a lion, and as determined as—as—a Yankee,’ very respectfully supplemented Mr. Jones. ‘If you will allow me, my lord, and all, I will tell you a fact about him. We know him well—all of us, and how he knocks about, walking miles through London and suburbs. One night late, and dark as ink, he had just left a friend’s house close to Epping Forest, beyond Leytonstone. Going at a swinging pace, he suddenly came on two men, or rather they came on him. It was a case of money or mischief; but his Grace floored one in an instant, and made for the other, but he bolted.

And, to show you the grand pluck of a true Englishman, blest if he did not drag the fellow he floored two miles to a police station. Yes, literally dragged him, and handed him over to the force, appearing next day to prosecute! If this is not true, my lord, please tell Mr. Thompson to stop my beer.¹

¹ Literally a fact, as to incident.

CHAPTER XXIV

The Sunrise after the Jubilee

ALL had decided to see the sun rise, as the first glimpse of dawn was even now upon them, and the far-off fires began to grow less distinct.

The stars are fading, and one by one are going out. In the far-away east just the least speck of a cloud can be descried, and another, and another, and presently they are washed over with the very palest tinge of pink, rolling mists and black shadows everywhere else. Now you catch a hazy outline of a high Fell, and there is something more of a deeper purple below, and of a softer light above. There comes out the spikes of a distant forest, and surely yonder is the mist o'erhanging the sea. The tender light

strengthens, and a more substantial body of colour o'erspreads the clouds, now growing more massive; and soon we have azure and green and purple, and rose and gold, broad streaks and narrow streaks of amber fire, and high up tiny faces of fully developed red. As the sun warms to his work there is a change in all these clouds and these colours every minute, almost every second; the shadows fly, the mountains and woods grow, and rivers can be traced and the clustered dwellings of man. A fine breeze springs into life; distant cattle low, and birds twitter and shake off the night, and yonder comes up the glorious sun! And with one accord a shout of welcome sprang from the assembled beholders.

Then it was home—some to sleep, some to toil, but all to be thankful to God and man for the pleasures so freely bestowed, and that our Queen had reigned for sixty years.

Descending the hill, Mr. Bolton told Lord Walton he had retained by telegraph the Attorney-General in the coming trial of the

‘stolen fiddle.’ Jack Sinclair walked slowly side by side with Lady Isabel, and as they passed over the place where the snowstorm had nearly proved the death of the latter, by mutual impulse they stopped, and a close embrace spoke more than any words could do. Jack only said, ‘My darling, it was here on that awful night that I first knew how I loved you!’ And she nestled closer to him, and thus they passed on, morning, joyous morning around them and in their hearts. And two thousand feet above them our old friend from Yorkshire was giving a kick to an empty beer barrel, and it rolled and rolled, and bumped and dashed down the hill, sending the scared sheep in every direction, like things bereft of sense. And so came to an end the festivities in honour of the Jubilee of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria.

CHAPTER XXV

The Trial of the Violin Case

ON the day fixed for the hearing of the case 'Bolton against Touche,' the Court was crowded, as might be expected, seeing that great interest had been aroused by the press referring so markedly to the same, sometime previously; and we venture to assert that any dealer in violins or connoisseur of note in or about London was there, and not a little anxious as to the result of an action which might strike at the very root of prejudice, and very seriously affect the money value of Cremona violins.

Nor was this all; the case had attracted the attention of those not either dealers or connoisseurs, but simply players and lovers of the instrument, and, as these sought to gain

at least some knowledge from the affair, and others expected some sort of exposure, and others some fun, the crush for any sort of a place was great.

The judge and jury are at last in their places, so are all our friends connected with this story. For the plaintiff, there is the Attorney-General, and with him Mr. Tully, Q.C., and another; and for the defendant, Sir Charles Wrestler, Q.C., and with him Mr. Boodles, Q.C., and another. The jury was a special one, and the case was called on the assembling of the Court.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL, in opening the case, said: 'My Lord, and gentlemen of the jury, I do not know whether I ever accepted a brief to which I attached more importance than I do to this which lies now before me, both on account of the seriousness, the depth and the cunning of the fraud implied, and of the fear that, if not exposed, a great danger to the confiding public may increase, and simply defy detection. Therefore I beg you most

carefully to follow me, and give me all the patience of which you are capable.

‘On a certain day Mr. John Sinclair, nephew and heir of Sir John Sinclair, Baronet, of Ambleside in Westmorland, gives and places an order for a special violin to a maker of that noble instrument of the name of Robert Blane. In due course the same is delivered and paid for, and we put in a receipt for the money paid for it. Mr. Sinclair is so much delighted with this fine example of modern art that he determines at once to show it to some very intimate friends at the Foot of Windermere, by name Lord Walton and his sister, the Lady Isabel Walton. He arrives there, shows the violin to them, and stays over the night, leaving the said violin with Lady Isabel—who, I am told, is a superior performer on it—to try over at her leisure for a few days. On the second morning following that on which Mr. Sinclair leaves the mansion of Lord Walton, Lady Isabel opens the case in which she deposited the violin by Blane, and

she finds not this, but a foreign fiddle, worth, I am instructed, about 15s. ! Now, gentlemen of the jury, I am not going further into this theft, for theft it was, excepting to say that I shall call in evidence this thief, who has come forward spontaneously, and I shall show you that he sold, or caused to be sold through an agent, this identical fiddle by Blane to the defendant, Touche !' (Here there were loud murmurs through the Court, at which the judge looked very angry, but which the wily counsel was only too glad to have elicited to wish to stop.) On silence being restored : 'I pass on to a certain Saturday night, near Christmas 1896—a night which many of you may remember as that on which the remarkable presence of mind, energy, and heroism of a fireman saved, probably, a vast amount of real property and works of art no money could replace. Well, it was on this night that Mr. Bolton, the plaintiff in this case, hearing of the fire, hurried there, as he knew it was near where so many valuable fiddles

were stored. He met close by the defendant Touche, and after discussing the probability of danger to the fiddles, they got on to talk business. And now I want your keen attention. The plaintiff asks the defendant if he had 'anything fresh,' meaning, of course, fiddles. The defendant said he had, but he feared the price would scare him. And it came out that he, defendant, had a fine Stradivari, £500, but that he could not show it—mark this—before the following Thursday, as he had so much to do to it, to fit it up, etc., etc. Of course he had, gentlemen of the jury—of course he had—for I shall show you that this same violin was the violin made by Blane for Mr. John Sinclair, and it needed much ageing, rubbing of corners, internal and external embellishments, etc., etc., etc., before it could be put under the eyes of a known connoisseur. Mr. Bolton insisted he had to be at Wray Castle (his residence) on Monday—could he not see it—only as it was, he could judge, and they would bargain? No—

of course not—it would not suit the books of this expert to show this ‘Stradivari’ as it was, so at last it was arranged that Thursday was to be the day. I may briefly pass over this, simply telling you that on that day the purchase was made of the instrument for £450 cash paid, a full receipt and guarantee given by the defendant, and a *pedigree* of this undoubted Stradivari! I pass on to say that this instrument was seen and identified in the collection of the plaintiff by the maker, R. Blane, and others whom I shall call; and I ask you—you who perhaps have professional and trade interests at stake—you who see daily, hourly, money passing from hand to hand, and from trusting man to his grasping neighbour—you who, as true Englishmen, ought to scorn, above all things, forgery, to give me your verdict, and, by so doing, to give power to the Crown to prosecute villainy. And, in asking this, I am almost tempted to add, I demand it, for if strength of evidence is worth anything, mine is overwhelming.

But I lay my case simply before you, gentlemen of the jury, not as an advocate, but as a man like yourselves, knowing that I shall have fair play and honest conviction.'

Here the learned counsel sat down, and there was a short pause. The clear statement of the case, and the cool manner of its delivery, had evidently produced an effect on the jury favourable to his client; but juries and spectators sway like a reed before opposing winds, and, perhaps before the verdict was given, there might be a similar display on the other side.

Presently the Attorney-General again rose, and called 'Robert Blane.' On that individual appearing in the witness-box, the counsel asked—

'Your name, I believe, is Robert Blane?'

'It is.'

'You are a maker of violins?'

'I am.'

'Did you, on your oath, make the violin now in court?'

‘I did.’

‘That you solemnly swear?’

‘I do—and I made it specially for Mr. John Sinclair.’

‘Was it, when delivered by you to Mr. John Sinclair, in the condition in which we now find it?’

‘No, it is very different, and has a marvellous resemblance to an old instrument. There has been great pains bestowed to make it look as it does; but I recognise my work, my wood, my purfling, and a peculiar incision near the eye of the scroll.’

‘You have no doubt at all that this is your work, and yours entirely?’

‘None whatever, that is, in the outer body; but there is much inside that is not my work—this I soon saw through the sound-holes, and through the hole at the broad end of the instrument where a peg is inserted.’

‘Have you made many such violins?’

‘Yes, over one hundred on that model.’

‘Is it peculiar?’

‘Yes, it is on the lines of the noted violin by Stradivari named ‘The Dolphin,’ and is of the great period.’

‘How do you mean—the great period?’

‘Stradivari made his greatest works of art from 1700 to 1725—hence we call this “the great period.”’

‘Thank you, Mr. Blane—that is all I wish to ask you.’

By Sir C. WRESTLER: ‘Before you stand down, kindly tell me if you recognised the violin as made by you immediately it was handed out of the cabinet in which the plaintiff kept the instruments?’

‘Not immediately — it was some five minutes before I fully made up my mind.’

‘How was that?—remember the answer you just gave my learned friend, the Attorney-General, relative to the work, the wood, the purfling, and the mark near the eye of the scroll. You, so experienced, one would suppose would at least know his own work at a glance.’

‘I at once *thought* the instrument was such as I made, and had made; but when I took it to a large French window, at the end of the room, I had no doubt at all it was by me—nor have I now.’

‘Tell me—did you say, “But what is that violin, Mr. Bolton, which you have always passed over—by whom is that made?”—or words to that effect?’

‘Yes, I did say so.’

‘But why—had you an idea you recognised your work *even then*?’

‘I thought it was very like wood of similar fire and fibre to that which I used—but then I had no thought it was my work.’

‘I suppose you have much to gain and little to lose should this action result in a verdict for the plaintiff?’

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: ‘I object to that question.’

THE JUDGE: ‘Clearly the question can be put, Mr. Attorney.’

SIR C. WRESTLER: ‘I will put it this way:

Should this violin be proved to have been your work, it will, of course, add greatly to your fame ?’

‘Well, it will, undoubtedly.’

‘And otherwise ?’

‘Then I am about as I was.’

‘Have you sold violins as low as £2 ?’

‘They have been sold by others, with, I am convinced, the object of lowering me and my work in the eyes of the general public.’

‘But if, in the open market, your work brings no more than £2, do you for a moment suppose any sane person will believe you when you try to pass off as your production an instrument for which £450 has been paid ? On your oath, tell the jury whether you made this violin ; and remember, it is your last chance, and woe be to you if you perjure yourself.’

‘I have already sworn to that, and I again swear that I *did* make the violin.’

Re-examined by Mr. TULLY, Q.C. : ‘There were many persons in the room when the violins were shown ?’

‘Yes, several.’

‘Were there any servants?’

‘Yes, there was a footman in and out most of the time, handing wine and fruits to the guests.’

‘Is it the fact that, on several occasions, your work has been re-sold at treble the original value you put upon it?’

‘On many occasions; and Mr. John Sinclair told me he would not have taken £100 for this disputed instrument.’

‘You sold it to him for £25?’

‘I did.’

‘Thank you—that is all I have to ask.’

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: ‘Call Mr. John Sinclair.’

On Mr. John Sinclair’s appearance—

‘You recognise the violin in court as that ordered by you of Mr. Blane?’

‘I do, Mr. Attorney.’

‘You have no doubt it is the same, though so much altered?’

‘None whatever.’

By Sir C. WRESTLER: 'When the instrument was handed to you, after Mr. Blane had said it was his work, at Wray Castle, did you say, "It is so altered that its own father would hardly know it"—or words to that effect?'

'I very probably did—it is about what I was likely to say.'

'Will you swear you did *not* say so?'

'Most certainly I will not: it is very likely I did use the words—and why not?'

'Oh, that is our affair, Mr. Sinclair.'

Mr. TULLY then called Lord Walton, and afterwards Lady Isabel, both of whom spoke as to their conviction that the instrument in court was that left at their residence, but neither would actually swear that they were positive.

After them Mr. TULLY called James Reynolds.

'You were formerly in the service of Lord Walton?'

'I was.'

'And you misconducted yourself, and served a certain time in prison?'

‘I did.’

‘Did you steal a violin from his lordship’s house, and send it to London to be sold?’

‘I did.’

‘To whom did you send it?’

‘To a brother of mine, John Reynolds.’

‘Do you recognise the violin now in court as the one you stole?’

‘I cannot swear to it, as I am no judge, and I only just looked at it before I sent it by train.’

By Sir C. WRESTLER: ‘Have you ever sold violins before this one?’

‘One or two.’

‘Tell the jury how many, on your oath.’

‘About a dozen.’

‘May I ask if you came by them as you did by this?’

‘Well, I stole some, that is a fact.’

‘And you are no judge—you mean to tell the jury that you don’t know a Cremona fiddle from this you stole, not a year old?’

‘Well, I know a good one from a bad one.’

‘I suppose we all do that. Is this instrument in the least like the one you took?—now mind.’

‘I do not think it is, sir.’

‘You may stand down.’

MR. TULLY : ‘Call John Reynolds. When you received the violin from your brother, to whom did you sell it, and for what sum?’

‘I sold it to Mr. Touche, the defendant, for twelve pounds.’

‘How did he pay you—in gold or by cheque?’

‘In gold entirely.’

‘Did you give him a receipt?’

‘No ; he said he did not require one.’

‘This you swear?’

‘I swear to this solemnly.’

By Sir C. WRESTLER : ‘Have you not also been twice in prison?’

‘I am sorry to say I have.’

‘For what offences?’

(In a low tone), ‘For forgery and perjury.’

‘Let the jury hear you—speak up.’

The witness repeated his answer in a louder tone.

‘You sold this violin, you say, to Mr. Touche : when ?’

‘On the 13th of December 1896.’

‘To this date you swear ?’

‘I do.’

‘That will do ; you may stand down.’

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL called, ‘Mr. Mutchinson.’

‘You are a well-known connoisseur and collector of violins ?’

‘Well, I am pretty fairish that way.’

‘You did not see this violin before it was stolen ?’

‘I did not.’

‘You have seen it since. Do you, as one well able to judge, believe it to be an old instrument, and by Stradivarius ?’

‘I am quite certain that it is neither the one nor the other.’

‘Do you know Mr. Blane’s work ? Have you seen many of his instruments ?’

‘I know his work well. I believe this to be his work, most certainly.’

By Sir C. WRESTLER: ‘You are known by several names, I think?’

‘Well, I have one or two when I’m near home.’

‘What may they be?’

‘“T’owd Lad” is one’ (laughter), ‘and “T’owd Fossil” is another.’ (Roars of laughter.)

‘Thank you; but you don’t look much like a fossil, Mr. Robinson.’

‘Mutchinson, sir, or “Owd Lad,” or “Owd Fossil,” but no Mr. Robinson for me; choose how.’ At this there was a universal roar of laughter, judge, jury, counsel, and all joining.

‘Well, Mr. Mutchinson, will you swear that this violin is a new one?’

‘I don’t swear much—Mrs. M. does not like it.’ (Laughter.)

‘Never mind your wife.’

‘I don’t, sir—just now.’ (Great laughter.)

‘But answer my question.’

‘Well, I am prepared to swear that, to the best of my judgment, it is a new violin.’

‘Is your collection composed of old or modern violins?’

‘Nearly all modern.’

‘And you have never had many old instruments in your possession—never a Stradivari?’

‘No, to both questions.’

‘Thank you—that is all.’

Re-examined : ‘But you have seen many a Stradivari, have you not?’

‘I’ve seen a lot called such, but I don’t even suppose they ever saw Italy, let alone old Strad. But I have had several genuine instruments in my hands, and I am quite certain this in court is not one of them.’

Several minor experts were then examined, and their testimony went to show that the instrument was a modern one. Then the Attorney-General, addressing the judge said—

‘My lord, I am desired to say that the

gentleman who possesses the genuine "Dolphin" Stradivari violin is in court, and asks permission to bring the instrument with him to-morrow, so that the jury may inspect, side by side with this, the violin now in dispute. I propose to close my case after the examination of Herr Meyerheim, who, I am glad to say, will give us his valuable time when the court opens in the morning ; and I shall call now the eminent expert, Mr. Maurie.

Mr. Maurie having stepped into the box, the Attorney-General thus began :—

‘ You are a leading expert as regards the violin ? ’

‘ I have that reputation. ’

‘ I want your evidence merely as to construction, general character of work, etc., not as to tone—that we go into with Herr Meyerheim. Now, Mr. Maurie, you have seen many of the make of Stradivari ; is this instrument in court one ? ’

‘ Most certainly not. ’

‘ But why ? Is it not very like one ? ’

‘So are two shillings, or two sovereigns, but, on close inspection very different. This violin is of modern make. Under a very powerful glass, which any one may use, the *wear is forged*—that is, it is worn and rubbed, and notched and cracked, in our day, not the wear and tear of years. The sweep of the volute and the depth of cutting are different, and the fluting of the back is not the same, and the terminal is longer than ever Stradivari finished his. The scroll, fine as it is, is not cut by Stradivari; nor is the purfling the same as he ever used. The edges are not carried to the same point of return, nor are the facing of the curves on back and belly just as he did them. The sound-hole, I must say, is exactly like his work, but the length of the corners of the instrument is not. Nor do I find the cutting and arrangement of the figure of the ribs such as I do in Stradivari. The general sweep, the general effect, at a glance, is that of a superb example of a great master; but, accustomed as I am to judge the

works of the great Italian, I am bound to say, this is not his work.'

'And about the varnish—do you not read Cremona instruments by this, sometimes solely?'

'Yes, and here is a very strong point for those who say this *is* a Cremona. I am convinced that this varnish on the violin by Mr. Blane is of the same quality as that used by Stradivari, but it is not *old* varnish, and it has not got the mellow glow and the subtle softness that age alone can bring. It is by far the finest modern varnish I have seen, and Mr. Blane is to be congratulated; but it was *not* put on this violin by Stradivari, that I swear.'

By Sir C. WRESTLER: 'I am informed that Stradivari frequently copied his master, Nicholas Amati; how then can you say that he followed a style and never deviated?'

'I did not say so. He often made what we term "Amatisa Strads," but in his

original work he was ever true to his own style.'

'But may he not, in arrangement of details, have deviated, in this one instance, say; especially as you admit the sound-holes to be exact as his are, which, I am told, is a crucial test?'

'It is impossible; the work is not that of Stradivari.'

'Well, Mr. Maurie, the jury will determine that. In the meantime, I will only further ask you, are you quite certain that your known judgment is correct in this instance, seeing that your admission of sound-holes and varnish leans so to the inference that the violin *was* made by Stradivari?'

'I am quite sure that the violin is modern; and I said the varnish, though of the same *quality* as the Cremona, was not mellowed by age, and, consequently, new.'

'Then about the inside of the instrument, have you studied that?'

'Sir, if I cannot read a fiddle outside, I

never look into it to gain information. If a man's face will not tell you what he is, it is of little use to look inside his head.'

This brought the sitting of the court to a close for that day.

CHAPTER XXVI

The Great Fiddle Trial Ended

AS it had been intimated that Herr Meyerheim would give his most learned evidence on the opening of the court on the following morning, it is not too much to say that every inch of room was occupied, and expectation was very strongly depicted on every face, and intense anxiety on not a few.

The great professor, on being called, quietly entered the box, and the Attorney-General thus began his examination—

‘You have inspected the violin about which this inquiry has been opened?’

‘Yes, I have, thoroughly.’

‘In your opinion, is it the work of Antonius Stradivarius?’

‘No.’

‘Neither as regards character of work nor tone?’

‘I feel quite certain it is not his work, nor is it his tone.’

‘It is about the tone only that I want your ripe judgment; will you give the jury your views? It is somewhat unusual to hear a violin in *this* room; but we have the learned judge’s permission for you to try the instrument alongside of your undoubted Stradivari, as you most kindly volunteered to do. But first, I wish the jury to inspect this “Dolphin Strad.,” which has just come into court.’

This world-famous violin was handed about for some time, and most carefully compared with the one about which we are writing, after which Herr Meyerheim said—

‘I draw the bow over the open strings, in fifths, on my violin, and now on the copy. To an educated ear the one is ripe, and the other new—not knit together, nor so full, nor mellow, nor pure. Then I run the whole scale of G from the open note up to the end

of the fingerboard, and you must perceive the very great freedom of the one, and the rapid utterance, whilst the copy it far more difficult to voice, and much less smooth. And I take the D, A and E strings, and I go over them, thus, and the result is the same. Now I stop in fifths all over both violins. Then I will play you several simple chords, and now I will play you others more complicated; listen, particularly to this in G minor—to me the difference is very much marked; whilst this one in A minor is more so. And in the arpeggio passages you will not fail to notice the smooth polish of the one against the undeveloped tone of the other. In seven instruments out of ten, what we call the wolf, or false note, is on the B \sharp . On my Strad. it is so, and so it is in this copy. But hear how they compare. And the B \sharp fifth—up on the higher shifts the new violin will not speak true, as any cultivated ear will not fail to detect. In these staccato passages, with both down bow and up bow, I am com-

pelled to use greater pressure both of bow and stopping in the case of one than I am with the other, and the result is by no means so satisfactory. I will shake all over both violins for you; and I will give you the harmonics also, all over, in single notes and in fifths; and, lastly, I will play you a complicated fugue on both, and now a very simple melody of Schumann's very high on the shift.'

Herr Meyerheim very carefully executed all he proposed, to the intense delight of the whole court. There seemed a very strong feeling for the plaintiff after this renowned artist had so ably gone into the matter of tone; and Sir C. Wrestler was too great and shrewd an advocate not to notice this at once, and to endeavour to mar the effect as much as possible.

SIR C. WRESTLER: 'I am sure you will grant me a few moments, Herr Meyerheim. No one could more appreciate your fine and truthful manipulation than I have done. But I should be glad if you will answer a few

questions. You do not, I presume, wish to underrate this "copy," as you term the violin in dispute ?'

'On the contrary: I think it simply a wonderful instrument for a modern one.'

'You admire Spohr, as a musician and as a man, I presume ?'

'Certainly.'

'Did you ever read his autobiography ?'

'Yes; in the original.'

'In one part he writes—I quote from memory: "I had the privilege of inspecting a rare collection of violins when in Italy" (Florence, I think he says), "among which was one by Stradivari that had evidently *never been played on*, or only a little. The tone was *raw, woody*, and not at all free; and it would take ten years to bring it to anything like a fair tone." Now, for the sake of argument, suppose we were to grant that this violin is not such as yours in point of freedom, etc., could we not presume it had not been much used or played upon ?'

‘That *could not* be, sir, as, from the wear and tear of the instrument you seek to prove it a very old one, and it *must*, if it be true, have been very much handled, consequently much played upon.’

‘Then your opinion is that it has *not* been much used?’

‘That is my view, certainly.’

‘You have had many genuine Strads. in your hands, I should say?’

‘Yes; more than most people.’

‘You have found *many* much inferior to your celebrated one?’

‘Oh yes,—many.’

‘And undoubtedly genuine?’

‘Yes.’

‘Thank you. I will not longer detain you.’

The JUDGE: ‘I cannot allow you, Herr Meyerheim, to leave the box without a word of thanks. I am sure I express the opinion of the whole court, when I say you have most nobly endeavoured by your admirable skill to make the question of tone clear to us,

and, by comparison, to help us in our judgment. Accept my thanks ; and we shall all ever remember your great consideration, and, I am bound to say, your condescension.'

After this, the Attorney-General intimated to the Judge that his case was now closed. Sir C. Wrestler was not long before he rose to address the jury for the defence ; and, as his eloquence was known to all present, expectation of a fine display of it was great. He said :—

'My Lord, and gentlemen of the jury,—My learned friend has at length brought his case to a close—a case, I may venture to predict, which will be long remembered for its absolute lack of proof, and its utter absence of tact in putting before you even that which may have had the *semblance* of proof.

'Take the evidence of his witnesses ; take the evasions of some, the shuffling of others, and, as I shall prove, the wilful lies of one upon whose testimony he seeks to win his case.

What are we here to have the veracity and the whole social status of my client cast to the winds by—what? Thief is an ugly word; liar is as bad; but you have it on evidence that this witness has been the one, and I shall show you that he is most certainly the other.

‘You have been told that it was some five minutes before the supposed maker of the violin could recognise his own work; and you have also been told that it was so much altered that its own father would hardly know it! Of course! And it has come out in evidence that these “modern Stradivari” have been sold in the open market at two pounds each! And a great expert says the wear and tear of this violin is forged; but he admits that the varnish—mark me—was of the same quality as the Cremona, though, he goes on to say, it is modern.

‘Modern! If I keep out of use a gold coin, made to-day, minus date, and show it fifty years hence, will any one tell me *then*

whether it is modern or not? Now, wine we *can* identify as old; but how on earth can this *fixed body* of colour change and gain in lustre and fire and subtle softness simply by growing old? Then the great point of tone has been most admirably brought before you; and you will do well to consider what Herr Meyerheim admitted relative to the degrees of excellence of even Stradivari.

‘Gentlemen of the jury, my learned friend, the Attorney-General, smiled when I called his case weak; but what will he do when I tell him and you that I shall show that in evidence which will absolutely snuff it out altogether? I shall show you that my client paid three hundred and eighty pounds for this violin, which my friend has failed to prove was made by R. Blane; I shall put in as evidence a written warranty and pedigree handed down from long past years; I shall show you that, on the day on which it has been said this disputed violin was sold to the defendant by one of my learned friend’s

witnesses, the said defendant was actually not at his place of business !

‘What is my client, the defendant ? A man respected by all ; who works hard ; who buys and sells largely ; whose credit is good. And you are asked to stultify all this,—nay, you are asked to ruin him, root and branch ; for, if you find for the plaintiff, you will most certainly do so. But you cannot do this : even if we had not a particle of proof as set off, you could not give the plaintiff your verdict, on his own showing.

‘And you will bear in mind that your responsibility is great, and that your decision will go to the uttermost corners of the earth ; for who plays not the violin nowadays ? and who does not buy a Cremona who can ? Shy will grow every purchaser if it can be shown that this is a forgery ; and there will be an absolute panic *if* it can be so shown. Your attention, gentlemen of the jury, has been most marked in this trial : may I, in conclusion, as I call

my witnesses, beg you to give me the same close attention; and the verdict which you will give will deter all in future from seeking to undermine a just man, and to drag down a noble work of ancient art to the level of the sort we see produced to-day.'

After a short pause, the learned counsel called 'Mr. Touche.'

'You are a maker of and dealer in violins?'

'I am.'

'How long have you been in business in London?'

'About twenty years.'

'Did you purchase the violin about which this case has arisen?'

'I did.'

'From whom?'

'From Carlo Verazzi, Milan.'

'When?'

'Early last December.'

'For how much?'

'For three hundred and eighty pounds cash.'

'Is this the receipt for it? and are this

warranty and this pedigree those which you received at the time of purchase ?’

‘That is the receipt, and these are the warranty and pedigree.’

Sir C. WRESTLER read these aloud, as follows :—

‘I warrant and guarantee this violin to be the work of Antonius Stradivarius.—Signed, C. VERAZZI, Milan.’

(The pedigree and warranty were in Italian, but the documents had been carefully translated, and were to this effect) :—

‘This violin, by Antonius Stradivarius, 1715, was originally purchased direct from the maker by Brother Anselmo, a former member of our holy community. It was kept in use after his death by Brother Paulo, and came at last to me. I sold it to Mr. Touche, London ; and I certify that this is the truth.—Signed, CARLO VERAZZI.’

‘Was the instrument in order when you got it ?’

‘No—very much out of order.’

‘And you, consequently, had much to do to it before you could offer it for sale?’

‘Yes.’

‘Is it a fact that you alleged this to Mr. Bolton as an excuse for not showing it to him earlier than you did?’

‘That is simply the truth.’

‘Did the plaintiff doubt the genuineness of the instrument when you showed it to him first?’

‘Not in the least: he said it was a noble example of the master.’

‘This you swear?’

‘I do.’

‘Where were you on the 13th December 1896?’

‘I was in Paris.’

‘On your oath?’

‘On my solemn oath.’

‘Do you know the witness, John Reynolds, who has sworn that he sold the violin in dispute to you?’

‘I may have seen him, but I do not recollect where.’

‘Never in your shop?’

‘No, certainly.’

Cross-examined by the ATTORNEY-GENERAL ‘Is the monk, Carlo Verazzi, from whom you say you purchased this violin, now alive?’

‘No, he is dead.’

‘Oh, *he* is also dead, is he?’

‘Yes.’

‘Do you know when he died?’

‘In January of this year.’

‘Or else we should have had him here, I suppose?’

‘Most certainly, Mr. Attorney.’

‘Yes, I dare say we should. He was an old man, I presume?’

‘Yes, more than eighty.’

‘Well, for an old man of eighty, I must say this writing is marvellous—but that is for the jury. Do you keep labels by you—copies of the old masters’ labels, I mean?’

‘Yes—we all do.’

‘Whom do you mean by *we*?’

‘Dealers in violins generally.’

‘But why do you keep them?’

‘Some people will have a label in their violin—we simply do it to accommodate our customers.’

‘Oh, I see. Will you swear that you did not originally put this label in this violin?’

‘I will and do swear it.’

‘Was the label in any way loose when you opened the violin for repairs?’

‘Yes, it was not sticking to the violin at two of the corners.’

‘Did you take it out to fix it afresh, or how?’

‘I forget exactly.’

‘Mr. Touche, please to answer my question.’

‘I do not remember.’

The JUDGE: ‘But you remember so exactly about the two corners—surely you can answer the Attorney-General?’

‘Well, my lord, I believe I *did* take out the label.’

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: ‘Ah! I thought so. Now, if you did, you would naturally

have to soften it on the outer surface to get it out intact ?’

‘Yes, we do that.’

‘Did you do so to this ?’

‘Well, it is the readiest way.’

‘*Did* you do so ?’

‘Yes.’

‘Gentlemen of the jury, look, each of you, at this label through the powerful glass we have already used, and draw your own conclusions as to whether water has ever touched those letters or that paper.’

‘Now, sir, I will ask you something else. You were in Paris on December 13th ?’

‘Yes.’

‘Did you call there on your way from Milan ?’

‘Yes, after buying the violin.’

‘Did you stay at an hotel ?’

‘I think where I stayed cannot affect this case.’

‘I do not ask you what you think: did you, or did you not, stay at an hotel ?’

‘No.’

‘May I ask where and with whom you *did* stay?’

‘I did not sleep in Paris. I pushed on and got what rest I could in travelling.’

‘Did you call on no one when in Paris—no dealer or connoisseur with whom you did business, or could have done?’

‘I did not call on any one. But I just spoke to one person I knew there whom I met accidentally.’

‘Is he in court?’

‘Not to my knowledge.’

‘Does he reside at Paris?’

‘Yes.’

‘One would have supposed that such a vital witness on your behalf would have been called—but that is, again, for the jury. Have you ever sold spurious instruments as genuine—I mean inadvertently?’

‘Once or twice; but I have always returned the money.’

‘Once or twice! Will you swear that you

did not, in 1894, sell no less than seven violins to another dealer, for which, in every case, you had to refund the money?’

‘I may have done so.’

‘Will you swear you did not?’

‘No.’

‘Ah! You were called in the trial “Bing v. Sting,” were you not?’

‘Yes.’

‘Is it the fact that you then privately reprimanded another expert, a dealer, for exposing a small trick in the trade, saying, “We should all work together”?’

Sir C. WRESTLER: ‘I am surprised at my learned friend. What on earth has this to do with this case?’

The JUDGE: ‘If you strongly object, Sir Charles, I must interfere; but I do think there is meaning in what has been asked.’

Sir CHARLES WRESTLER: ‘There may be meaning, my lord; but I am quite unprepared with rebutting evidence, therefore I *do* object strongly to the question.’

THE ATTORNEY - GENERAL : 'Very well. Who were your bankers, Mr. Touche, in 1892 ?'

'The London and County.'

'Are they your bankers now ?'

'Yes.'

'You have told the jury you do not know John Reynolds : is this true ?'

'I may have seen him, but not to know him.'

'You swear he never sold you any violins ?'

'No, I have no recollection.'

'He was never in your shop ?'

'Not to my knowledge.'

'My lord, before I ask the defendant the next question, I must crave permission to put in these three documents, only just at the moment come to hand.'

THE JUDGE : 'Let me see them. Of course —Sir Charles Wrestler, I presume you have no wish to stay this important evidence ?'

Sir Charles Wrestler read the papers, and merely bowed.

THE ATTORNEY - GENERAL : ' Now, Mr. Touche, is this cheque, drawn in favour of John Reynolds in 1892, signed by you ? '

The witness looked long at the cheque handed to him, and gave it back without a word.

' Is that your signature ? '

Witness, in a husky voice, ' It is. '

' And this, and this, both made payable to John Reynolds, also signed in your name ? '

The Witness said they were.

It is impossible to give any idea of the effect produced in court by this evidence.

Sir C. Wrestler did all he could in re-examination to negative this rude shock ; but the impression was most decidedly adverse to the defendant from this moment.

The next witness called was one of the shopmen of Mr. Touche, John Roberts.

By MR. BOODLES : ' How long have you been in the service of defendant ? '

' About seven years. '

' You have had a pretty fair knowledge of him and his business during that time ? '

‘Yes, I have seen a good deal.’

‘And you have found him straightforward?’

‘Quite, and a good business man, and——’

‘Never mind going into that. Do you know the witness, John Reynolds?’

‘No, never saw him before.’

‘Do you remember the 13th December?’

‘Yes.’

‘Was the defendant at his place of business on that day?’

‘I never saw him there.’

‘Did you hear of his having been there?’

‘No, nor do I think——’

‘Never mind what you think. You did not see him there?’

‘No, I did not.’

By Mr. TULLY : ‘Did he come on the day after—the 14th?’

‘Yes.’

‘How do you know?’

‘Because he brought with him the instrument now in court.’

‘This you swear?’

‘It was certainly——’

‘On your oath, look full at those twelve jurymen, and tell them if your employer came, as if from a journey, to his shop on the 14th December, bringing with him this violin in dispute?’

‘He did.’

‘You never saw this John Reynolds until to-day?’

‘No.’

One or two minor experts gave it as their belief that the violin was by Stradivari, and this closed the case for the defence.

Then the jury were briefly addressed by both counsel, after which the judge went carefully over all the evidence, and the jury retired to consider their verdict.

After one or two other minor cases had been disposed of, they again appeared in court, and the foreman, addressing the judge, said—

‘My lord, we are hopelessly divided in our judgment of this case.’

The JUDGE: ‘I am sorry for you, be-

cause I shall have to lock you up until you are unanimous, one way or the other. Can I help you in any point ?’

The foreman consulted for some time with his colleagues, after which he said : ‘We should like Mr. Blane to be again put into the box, and that one of our body, who knows a deal about fiddles, be allowed to ask him a few questions. Can this be done, my lord ?’

‘Certainly—let Mr. Blane be again called.’

Mr. Blane accordingly went into the box.

A JURYMEN : ‘You tell us you put many private marks inside the violins you make. Do you suppose all have been obliterated in this which you say you made ?’

‘I fear so.’

‘But why not take off the belly or upper table and make this case clear one way or the other—have you no hidden proof somewhere ?’

‘I am not certain—I can speak more surely if I am allowed to remove the belly.’

No objection was raised to this—in fact, the defendant seemed anxious that the violin

should be opened, as he very well knew he had erased every mark likely to lead to identification. Great interest was manifested by all present, as Mr. Blane proceeded in a very skilful manner to remove the belly. When he had done this, he said, 'I find every mark gone by which I could prove the instrument my make ; but I had better say at once that in some of my violins I put my name where no one would dream of looking ; I am not sure whether I did so in this violin, but I will see.'

He then removed the small squares of pine which locked the back joints, and he also did so in the case of the belly : I mean those six pieces which are put down the centre of back and belly, to make the pieces united only by glue hold more firmly. These had not been removed by Mr. Touche. When he had done this, without a word, he handed both parts to the judge, who gazed in astonishment at them ; for sure enough, there, under each small square, were these letters,

R. BLANE! He passed them to the jury, the jury to the counsel, and the great fiddle trial was over!

Of course, I need hardly say that the verdict was for the plaintiff; nor yet, that the court broke up in something approaching disorder. And I had better at once dispose of Mr. Touche, by saying, that in due course he was tried for perjury and forgery, found guilty, and for some years at least would not again pass a modern violin for a Stradivari.

CHAPTER XXVII

And Last

SOME days after the foregoing memorable trial, the following leader in a well-known London paper was read with mixed feelings wherever it was circulated, which feelings we do not pause to dissect, much less to comment upon, simply because we are quite ignorant of their nature! If we have the power, as story-teller, of being in two places at once, that is one thing; but to be in the heads of millions at one and the same time, is quite another, and by no means to be desired—in some cases!—

‘It is with real pleasure that we record the noble recognition, by Her Majesty, of an art held by some in far too low estimation: we refer to that of modern violin-making. It

appears the Queen has read, with much interest, the remarkable trial, "*Bolton v. Touche*"; and she has been so much struck by the fact of a modern Englishman being able to produce an instrument declared to be the work of Stradivarius—sold as and passing for such—that she has conferred the honour of knighthood on Mr. R. Blane, the celebrated maker, whose name and work figured so conspicuously in this case. Doubtless this information will surprise many, but why should it do so? To our thinking, the surprise ought to be that such a noble art—ay, and a truly fine art, too—should not have been, ere this, more generally appreciated: of course, we refer to modern work. Had it been, we doubt not that the honour just conferred would have been a thing of the long past.

‘And some will laugh to think of a fiddle-maker, and an English fiddle-maker, to boot, being knighted! But again, why? We are not given to laughter when modern painters, modern musicians, and modern mayors are so

honoured ; not a bit of it. Then why, we again ask, when the maker of a fiddle is ? Perhaps these amused gentry are not aware what is imperatively required of the man who aspires to become really great in the art ? We will tell them :—

‘His workmanship must be perfect, or he passes not the man who looks at this only ; a master of acoustics, as he has to fashion a perfect musical instrument ; an artist, in every sense of the word. Therefore we contend, on the above grounds, that this is a great art work. The painter has to depict nature on canvas, and has finished ; the sculptor, to reproduce the human form in marble ; while the musician appeals to the sense of hearing only. But here, in this art so little understood or followed in these days, we find *three* imperative essentials ; and if the producer fail in one he fails in all. What wonder, then, that there are so few who, persevering to the end, come out great !

‘The true artist may work on the lines

and curves of another, yet be original in all : he may cleave to a style, yet that style may and does become, under his fine genius, his creation, in art ; he puts himself into his work, and his personality breathes in it ; his life is his work, as sure as his work has to sustain that life.

‘ But the copyist, he who can only work on the lines of the rule-of-thumb and compass, degrades the art to which he says he belongs, but does not belong ; and should such a one set out with the intention of truth and truth only in his profession, but gradually fall away to the degradation of pot-boilers, and subjugate the original spark of genius, let us tell that man he rightly deserves that scorn which will most surely hound him to the level of such nonentities.’

.

In due course, and on the same day, Lord Walton married Miss Sinclair, and Mr. John Sinclair Lady Isabel Walton ; and I hope my fair readers will rest well after such an assur-

ance. But what will they say of me for making known what Lady Isabel said to her husband on his recovery of the fiddle about which all this bother has been ?

‘Dear old fiddle ! When you were stolen, how little I knew that the perfect happiness for which I yearned was to be mine so soon !’

‘But you didn’t love me before I——’

‘I did, you blind Scotsman ! and much you seem to appreciate it !’

Jack, for answer, took Master Rat from his coat pocket, where he had, as usual, made himself comfortable, and threw him at his wife, saying—

‘It reminds me of one I once heard——’ but Lady Isabel had fled, stopping her ears.

THE END

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